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Dietrich and Sternberg : from cabaret performance to feminist empowerment

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DIETRICH AND STERNBERG: FROM CABARET PERFORMANCE TO
FEMINIST EMPOWERMENT

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Television, Radio, Film and Theatre

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Elizabeth Anne Taylor

May 2009

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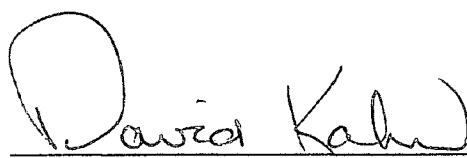
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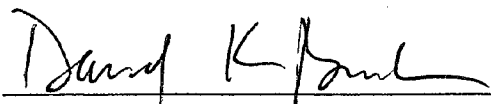
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ABSTRACT

DIETRICH AND STERNBERG: FROM CABARET PERFORMANCE TO FEMINIST EMPOWERMENT

By Elizabeth Ann Taylor

This thesis addresses the multivalent icon Marlene Dietrich in her first two films *The Blue Angel* (1929) and *Morocco* (1930), which were directed by Josef von Sternberg. It examines the complex roles of the two cabaret performers that Dietrich played through the lens of feminist philosopher Amy Allen's theory of empowerment articulated in her book: *The Power of Feminist Theory: Domination, Resistance and Solidarity*. Specifically it analyzes how the cabaret personas developed personal empowerment cultivated out of two specific elements of mise-en-scène, gestures/body language and costume and how those aspects uplift the characters of Lola Frölich (*The Blue Angel*) and Amy Jolly (*Morocco*) into situations where these women resist heteronormative assumptions about women as sexually objectified performers existing solely for the male gaze.

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Marlene

By Noel Coward (1954)

We know God made the trees
And the birds and the bees,
and seas for the fishes to swim in.

We are also aware,
that he had quite a flair,
for creating exceptional women.

When Eve said to Adam,
“Start calling me Madame.”
The world became far more exciting.
Which turns to confusion,
The modern delusion,
That sex is a question of lighting.

For female allure,
Whether pure or impure,
Has seldom reported a failure.

As I know and you know,
From Venus and Juno,
Right down to La Damo Camelia,
This lover it seems is a substance of dreams
to the most imperceptive perceiver.

The swimmers of the Nile,
Could achieve with a smile,
Far quicker results than Geneva.

Now we all might enjoy,
Helen of Troy,
as a gay, cabaret entertainer.
But I doubt that she could,
Be one quarter as good,
As our legendary, lovely,
Marlene.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

Marlene Dietrich's legendary presence in the world began with her work as an actor, singer, and cabaret chanteuse. Then her roles expanded to being a wife, lover, mother, grandmother, activist and ultimately a symbol of liberation. Marlene Dietrich is one of the most multivalent icons of the twentieth century. In fact, Stephan Bach remarks, "the perpetuation of 'Marlene Dietrich'—the legend and artifact—was one of the most disciplined and sustained creative acts of the twentieth century" (xi). Marlene Dietrich's cabaret style that rocketed her to fame and notoriety was ultimately the role and image that galvanized her not only as an actress and stage performer, but it was also her vehicle by which to impart her humanitarian contributions to those who longed for them most. Whether this intriguing stage persona was with a lover, a costar, or legions of soldiers that she entertained in order to boost morale, lovely, legendary Marlene made an unforgettable mark on the world's many stages.

During her early years in film, Dietrich starred in seven films masterminded by director Josef von Sternberg. From 1929-1935, these films were a collection of stories of females who seemingly rose above mediocre status and circumstances in a manner that allowed them to be read as symbols of liberation. In their films, Dietrich played a spy in *Dishonored*, Catherine the Great in *Scarlett Empress*, a heartbreaking vamp in *Devil is a Woman*, a high-class madam in *Shanghai Express*, a single mother trying to keep her son in *Blonde Venus* and cabaret performers in *The Blue Angel* and *Morocco*.

The existing body of literature on Marlene Dietrich is written from a wide range of perspectives and generates many perceptions of her. Texts range from tell-all

biographies to feminist film criticism published in book-length and journal article form. Among them, texts that refer to fashion and historical photography from Hollywood's glamour era of the 1930s to the 1940s reference Dietrich when talking about women whose style started new trends for women's fashion and perhaps pointed toward more empowered images of femininity. Sarah Berry in her book, *Screen Style: Fashion and Femininity in 1930s Hollywood* claims that Dietrich (literally) wore the pants in Hollywood. "Dietrich openly promoted women's adoption of menswear. Stating that women's clothes take too much time—it is exhausting. Men's clothes do not change." (Berry 145-146). However, Dietrich was not the only woman changing her style to reflect the shifting economic times of the 1930s. Robert McElvaine has discussed that wearing pants came to be seen as symbolic of Depression-Era concepts where men were questioning their ability to provide for their families as more women moved into the workforce. This reinvention and perception of Dietrich's style has often been referenced as symbolic of her independent thinking. Specifically McElvaine states, "the Depression can be seen as having effected a 'feminization' of American society. The self-centered, aggressive, competitive 'male' ethic of the 1920s was discredited. Men who lost their jobs became dependent in ways that women had been thought to be" (McElvaine 340). The films of Sternberg that starred Dietrich were produced during the beginning of the Depression. The kind of feminization of men that McElvaine speaks of can be seen in the Sternberg/Dietrich films, but those films have been examined only recently within the context of revised feminist film theory and merit further analysis, as I will discuss.

Other investigations of Marlene Dietrich's wearing of pants and tuxedos in films support my interpretations of costume choice as not only helping to build early lesbian screen images but also symbolize a woman's resistance to being relegated to an objectifying screen image. Andrea Weiss in her book *Vampires and Violets, Lesbians in the Cinema* discusses this notion in greater detail. "Their appropriation of male clothing while retaining female identity, their aloof and inscrutable manners, and their aggressive independence provided an alternative model upon which lesbian spectators could draw" (Weiss 44). These interpretations of Dietrich follow a trend to view her as an early pioneering image of sexual liberation and a role model of a woman living without shame. These resources reinforce my work of seeing Dietrich as a symbol of empowerment within the world of film stars. As Adrian Martin, in her article "Dietrich and Sternberg: The Fallen Angels" claims, "Dietrich was often a bisexual or polysexual figure open to many kinds of audience identifications and fantasies" (Martin 2). This interpretation parallels the analysis of some of the characters she played, Amy Jolly and Lola Frölich included. The diverse biographies about her personal life also reinforce these interpretations of her being unrepressed about her sexuality and seeking to live her life with a free and unashamed attitude. Stephan Bach has written the definitive biography on her life, published in 2000, *Marlene Dietrich, Life and Legend*. This book gives a thorough and extensive amount of research on her personal life, career choices, and service in the US Army along with facts about her achievements later in life when she toured the world singing her classic songs with Burt Bacharach.

According to Cari Beauchamp in an article promoting a new biography, *Joseph P. Kennedy Presents*, for the March 2009 issue of *Vanity Fair*, Dietrich had many lovers though she stayed married to her husband Rudolf Seiber until his death. Some of her rumored paramours create quite a provocative list of literary and creative talent, Sternberg included. Some of her lovers were Jimmy Stewart, Edith Piaf, French actor turned WWII soldier for the French Military, Jean Gabin, Yul Brenner, Maurice Chevalier, William Saroyan, Edward R. Murrow, Erich Maria Remarque, Frank Sinatra, cross-dressing Standard Oil Heiress, Jo Carstairs and patriarch Joe Kennedy and then twenty years later, his son John F. Kennedy. While this information is not part of my research, it is interesting to notice how Dietrich lived her love life to the fullest without shame, just like her character Lola Frölich.

Two documentary films about Marlene Dietrich reveal aspects of feminism within her personal life. One from 1986 simply called *Marlene*, directed by Maxmillian Schell, is an intimate interview with Dietrich where she answers all of his questions as long as he never shows her face. Dietrich asking not to be gazed upon is oddly coincidental in that she was obviously much older and was vainly circumventing judgment about her age and appearance. Her choice not to show her face is another way in which she resists objectification. The other documentary, *Marlene Dietrich: Her Own Song*, produced in 2001, which would have marked Marlene Dietrich's 100th birthday, specifically touches on Dietrich's humanitarian contributions working with the US Army during World War II. This film articulates that her work with the military involved translating documents written in German and French along with entertaining the troops. The interviews with

her daughter, Maria Riva, various close friends, artists, film scholars, journalists and military officials characterize Dietrich as a woman who was not afraid to voice her opinions or stand up against injustice.

In addition to the insightful documentary films, there are several journal articles that characterize where Marlene Dietrich's films coincide with political shifts in Germany during the transitions of the Weimar Republic. *The Blue Angel* is noted as a film, which symbolizes the artistic freedoms of cabaret in Berlin in Weimar Germany that were ultimately overshadowed and destroyed once the Nazis began to infiltrate Germany. Sternberg and Dietrich are mentioned as major contributors to the advancement and controversy of women's roles in Weimar Germany through their creation of *The Blue Angel*. Richard W. McCormick in his article, "From Caligari to Dietrich: Sexual, Social, and Cinematic Discourses in Weimar Film" notices that the empowered vamp/femme fatale was an image that did not fall in line with Alfred Hugenberg's goal for Weimar Cinema (Hugenberg was a publishing magnate and an ultraconservative ally of the Nazi party): "In the Weimar Cinema that he wanted to create, there was an aversion to division, plurality and the longing for a monolithic fusion" (641). This aversion extended to roles for women as well. While the constitution of the Weimar Republic not only was Germany's first Democratic constitution, it also offered German women the promise of legal equity for the first time. However, McCormack argues that the presence of a vamp symbolizes empowerment of the other; the other meaning: Jews, homosexuals, foreigners and anyone else who had humiliated the German fatherland. "German

national identity was equated with manhood; this collective male consciousness was obsessed with loss of male power and authority” (648).

The more academic investigations of the Dietrich/Sternberg cycle point to varying disputes within the world of film theory. Often, Sternberg’s use of *mise-en-scène* is examined according to how he fills the frame and what types of symbolism evolve out of his imaginative worlds. The way he employs *mise-en-scène* becomes a significant issue within textual analysis of his works and how Marlene Dietrich’s physical attributes contribute to Sternberg’s films. Some early critics view Sternberg’s work as excessively reliant on set design and image while recent critics view his work as more lasting than initially thought. Writing from an American auteurist perspective, Andrew Sarris notes, “Sternberg was then considered slow, decadent, and self-indulgent, while gloriously ambiguous Marlene Dietrich was judged too rich for the people’s blood—it was time for bread, not cake. Paradoxically, Sternberg and Dietrich today look deeper and more dazzling than ever” (5).

This thesis will add to the critical debate in feminist film theory by analyzing the Dietrich/Sternberg films in which costumes and gesture/body language, demonstrate levels of power that are specified by Dartmouth College Associate Professor and Chair of Philosophy and Women’s and Gender Studies, Amy Allen in her book, *The Power of Feminist Theory: Domination, Resistance and Solidarity*. This philosophy will be used as a filter through which to create a textual analysis of the films *The Blue Angel* and *Morocco*. There are book-length investigations of and scholarly articles about the Dietrich/Sternberg collaboration that discuss their work through a lens of feminist film

theory; however none does so using Allen's framework. Nevertheless, such works closely connect to my own interests. I regard Dietrich's performances in her cabaret sequences as particularly significant in that these musical numbers empower her characters by giving them financial stability, options about the kind of partner she may or may not want and the ability to express her sexuality without shame or humiliation, as I will discuss in future chapters.

In particular, feminist film theorists Laura Mulvey and Claire Johnston have very specific views on the Sternberg/Dietrich collaboration. Writing in the 1970s, both view Dietrich's sexual masquerade as "an indication of the absence of woman in male-dominated Hollywood cinema because woman is presented only in terms of what she represents for man" (107). Mulvey uses Freudian/Lacanian psychoanalytic theory to define two mutually misogynistic avenues to pleasure: Sternberg's "fetishistic scopophilia" and Hitchcock's sadistic voyeurism. Both concepts are phallocentric and depend on "the image of the castrated woman" while supporting the patriarchal values of mainstream culture. However, read from a perspective using Allen's model of power, these notions of woman as object could be viewed differently: the two characters Dietrich play find power through their performance abilities even though the performances are initially for a male gaze.

Though Mulvey's and Johnston's theories challenge traditional Hollywood cinema, their views on the cross dressing of Dietrich better serves their analysis and do not further the understanding of the Sternberg/Dietrich collaboration in terms of creating female characters with at least an ambivalent relationship to power. Ultimately, as will

be discussed later, Sybil DelGaudio views the stylized sexual ambiguity of Marlene Dietrich as “a sign of Sternberg’s understanding of woman’s position as both soldier and victim within male-dominated society” (109). This statement is useful in supporting my identification of the various levels of female liberation of Dietrich’s characters in two of her films with Sternberg.

The Sternberg/Dietrich collaboration is analyzed in greater detail in Studlar’s 1988 book, *In the Realm of Pleasure: Von Sternberg, Dietrich and the Masochistic Aesthetic*. This very complex and detailed account of the six films starring Marlene Dietrich produced by Sternberg at Paramount forms an aesthetic model based on the psychoanalytic concept of masochism. Her work provides one of the most comprehensive critiques of Mulvey’s model even though she continues the discussion about the power and meaning of Dietrich’s screen image within a psychoanalytic framework. Her text is considered to be the definitive analysis of the Dietrich/Sternberg collaboration. Studlar agrees with Mulvey that Sternberg’s films use Dietrich’s body and her cinematic image in order to create a male fantasy. However, she states that there is a pleasure of looking at these films from the perspective of masochism rather than sadism or sadomasochistic conflicts. “The male character-spectator submits to the gaze of the female/Dietrich in longing for a Pre-Oedipal relation to the mother, before scenarios of maternal castration and lack dominate the formation of subjectivity” (10). Remaining within a psychoanalytic model of Freudian/Lacanian feminist film theory, Studlar seeks to expand on Mulvey’s analysis of the images of women and positions offered to both male and female spectators of the classical Hollywood film. She suggests that there are

alternatives to spectatorship that circumvent the patriarchal and heteronormative power agenda.

Studlar analyzes each of Sternberg's Paramount films with Marlene Dietrich, (with the exception of *The Blue Angel* for no specified reason) and discusses the power of the performer and how role reversals, gestures and androgynous behaviors contribute to a way of seeing and creating a world where the woman does possess power to take action. "Her aloofness suggests a distancing from her constructed image, a refusal to invest in her femininity to merely attract men" (243). This aloof and disconnected quality initiates Dietrich and the characters she created to become appealing to both men and women. She also argues that Mulvey does not explore the implications of her own point that Sternberg's films with Dietrich allow for "direct erotic rapport" between the female image and the spectators.

Feminist film theorist Judith Mayne has also written about Marlene Dietrich's paradoxical presence in the world of feminist film theory and studies. She has two articles in *Dietrich Icon* edited by Gerd Gemunden and Mary R. Desjardins, 2007. Specifically her article "Marlene Dietrich, *The Blue Angel* and Female Performance," from the 1992 book *Seduction & Theory, Readings of Gender, Representation and Rhetoric* discusses the ways in which Dietrich represents the handful of classic Hollywood actresses who represent the notion of resistance, a concept that is central to the methodological approach I employ in order to analyze Dietrich's performances in *The Blue Angel* and *Morocco*. For Mayne, resistance means that while the female character is created as an image that will be pleasing for a man, she can resist or create resistance to

dominating forces. Mayne states, “[Dietrich] is a particularly appropriate example of the difficulties and complexities of a feminist reading of the female star. Her sexual ambiguity has been noted more than once, in the sense both of her androgynous beauty, underscored by her appearances in drag and transgression of sexual boundaries” (Mayne 30). Mayne discusses how Dietrich can be seen as a “resisting image” and that her early films are alive with narrative and visual imagery that support this idea and compose the Dietrich screen persona. For Mayne, this resistance is an aspect of Dietrich’s characters’ performance abilities and ironic imitations of the conventions of femininity that are especially present in *The Blue Angel*.

The *Dietrich Icon* text contains 17 journal articles and essays written within the last five years regarding Dietrich’s presence within the world of film theory studies. It addresses previously discussed material about Dietrich’s status as a star and the meaning of star personas. It reviews her daughter Maria Riva’s biography and Dietrich’s own book *Marlene’s A B C*. It covers a wide range of articles regarding Dietrich’s legs, her face, and the 1999 (very unsuccessful) biographical German film of her life entitled *Marlene*. For my work, the two most useful articles are Elisabeth Bronfen’s “Seductive Departures of Marlene Dietrich: Exile and Stardom in *The Blue Angel*” and Gaylyn Studlar’s “Marlene Dietrich and the Erotics of Code-Bound Hollywood.” Bronfen looks at Siegfried Kracauer’s criticism of *The Blue Angel* when he first reviewed it in 1930. She cites two major aspects of the film,

“First, of which was Dietrich’s new incarnation of sex; her callous egoism and her cool insolence. The other reason for the film’s success was the film’s outright sadism. How the masses are irresistibly attracted

by the spectacle of torture and humiliation” (23).

The film traces the humiliation and demise of Rath (Jannings) as he falls in love with Lola-Lola (Dietrich) and ultimately is destroyed by her world. Bronfen notes that the encounter between high school professor and the cabaret singer is one that symbolizes the roles of power and empowerment between women and men. In language that reveals the influence of psychoanalytic feminist film theory (and Gaylyn Studlar in particular) she claims the marriage of Rath and Lola is one “in which both spectator and the woman as eroticized object of display oscillate uncannily between sadistic empowerment and masochistic disempowerment” (6). She observes that Sternberg creates an uncanny blur of the traditional distinction between feminine performer and masculine spectator. This perspective is useful for this project because there is an element of control that Dietrich conveys that Bronfen discusses. Lola-Lola is the bearer of a sadistic gaze and Rath is the bearer of a masochistic gaze. I expand on these issues more specifically as I blend the definition of Amy Allen’s domination, resistance and solidarity theory and apply it to the feminine performer and her experiences.

Gaylyn Studlar’s 2001 article, “Marlene Dietrich and the Erotics of Code-Bound Hollywood” discusses the films *Morocco* and *The Blue Angel* and how Hollywood was careful in its communication of sexuality during the 1930s. Dietrich and Garbo were symbolic of the kind of “Northern-Euro-glamour” that audiences were interested in at the time. The issues of sinful girls in love and how the women in these kinds of films did or did not suffer became an issue for the producers of what was known as “women’s films.” These are films whose central characters are female, and they often struggle to find true

love or are on a journey to discover their identity. Moral and political censors were becoming more involved in labeling these films. In 1933, Will Hays enforced and reorganized the Code. It was motivated by publicity that gave the impression that the industry had been ineffective in controlling the moral content of Hollywood films. Throughout her article, Studlar discusses Sternberg's use of mise-en-scène and complex articulation of sexuality and mature themes in and through his film style. The imposition of the 1934 Production Code forced directors to be less obvious and far more innovative when developing their films' portrayals of sexuality.

Dietrich's cinematic screen image is also a source of socio-political commentary regarding the oppression of women as discussed in Lea Jacobs' 1992 article "The Censorship of *Blonde Venus*: Textual Analysis and Historical Method." Jacobs discusses the studio system and the Hayes production code along with its influence on cinematic images during Sternberg and Dietrich's partnership. *Blonde Venus* is often analyzed because its story confronts the revelatory conflicts relating to the representation of female sexuality and the family (21). Jacobs' article reviews the basic plot of the film and suggests that the censors were part of the reason why the end of the film seems so contrived. It was the studio's desire to keep with the notion of the "happy ending" however unrealistic or artificial it may seem today. The ending suggests the dignity of the woman is maintained only if she stays with her husband, thereby making her seem to be a loyal wife and mother.

A more recent publication that closely parallels my interests in the Dietrich/Sternberg collaboration is Catherine Constable's book, *Thinking in Images, Film*

Theory, Feminist Philosophy and Marlene Dietrich. Published in 2005, Constable analyzes three films *Scarlett Empress*, *Devil is a Woman* and *Shanghai Express*.

Through a continuation of Gaylyn Studlar's masochistic aesthetic analysis she seeks to argue the limitations of Studlar's approach. Constable chooses these three films because she feels that they do not fit into the previously set models of the woman as object of the male gaze that have often been discussed in feminist film theory. She quotes Robin Wood's suggestion of the notion that Dietrich's star persona can be formulated in terms of a question, "How does a woman assert herself in a world where all of the rules are made by men?" (Wood 61) Constable creates a reading that is compatible with Mayne's interpretations of Marlene Dietrich's ability to resist the very constructs that limit her. Constable posits the notion that Dietrich's women gain success on their own terms with the use of their feminine resources. Constable provides a positive interpretation of the previously negative labels of the torturess, woman as capricious, and the seductress for each of Dietrich's characters in the three films. Ultimately, she finds Studlar's argument flawed because it is based on male reactions to the masochistic experience. "While Studlar attempts to move beyond binary structures, their hierarchical logic reemerges in her accounts of the psychic mechanisms of masochism which clearly take the male experience as the standard" (Constable 58). This flaw, argues Constable, is obvious in Studlar's analysis of fetishism and disavowal. While Studlar argues that the psychic reactions happen before the "castration complex" they are all based on male projections and reactions to these constructs. If Studlar's goal is to create a feminist film theory of the six Sternberg films starring Marlene Dietrich, it is problematic that her analysis

focuses on male reaction to the female image on screen, instead of an emphasis on female reaction.

Carole Zucker, a contemporary of Gaylyn Studlar, wrote her book, also published in 1988, *The Idea of Image: The Films of Josef von Sternberg*, from a completely different analytical perspective that provides new directions to the analysis of Marlene Dietrich. She argues that Dietrich's enduring mystery is a result of the duality within her characters. These dualities form a shift in the narratives and the way that Sternberg used the camera in order to frame these transitions. Dietrich's characters are configured according to what Carole Zucker claims are "varied forms of pain/pleasure, denial/desire, victim/victor, controlled/controller, [which] provide an extraordinary amount of the narrative material in Sternberg's films" (135). According to her analysis, it is entirely possible for a Dietrich character to embody each of these aforementioned traits and the costumes of her various "divinations" seemed to galvanize and enhance Dietrich's iconic cultural status.

The notion of duality within Dietrich characters is useful to my own study, particularly in terms of the narrative and visual shifts in the films that may symbolize Dietrich's characters as victimized, and later on as victorious. Zucker's analysis discusses Sternberg as a "mise-en-scène" director. According to auteurist Andrew Sarris, a mise-en-scène director is one who is responsible for the entire authorship of the films that he directs, one whose vision is the controlling factor of the film. Essentially, mise-en-scène encompasses everything within the frame of the film. Zucker spends a great deal of time analyzing the significant scenes with Dietrich in five of the seven films

created with Sternberg, going shot by shot. While *mise-en-scène* is not the focus of this thesis, the various dualities of Dietrich's characters can be interpreted as symbols of feminine experience of power relations, expressed through costuming, gesture and body language within the Sternberg/Dietrich body of work. In ensuing chapters, I pay specific attention to the cabaret performances and how these moments trigger changes in the lives of the Dietrich characters. The dualities embodied by Amy Jolly and Lola Frölich are suggested images of domination within a patriarchal society and simultaneously the resistance to that domination. Zucker goes to great lengths to explain how von Sternberg uses camera angles and visual images in order to give meaning to the personalities that Dietrich portrayed. This project seeks to build on the existing work by Mayne and Zucker in order to understand ways in which power is represented or signified by those visual images within the two films that have been selected.

While Zucker investigates the basic visual and performance aspects set up for Dietrich by Sternberg, there is another layer of interpretation available based on the symbols of empowerment she demonstrates within her characters' performance styles. Zucker discusses Dietrich's gestures and cabaret numbers, but there is no feminist reading of the acting choices of the characters Marlene Dietrich plays. Within her investigation, Zucker concludes that Dietrich's characters undergo shifts in attitude within a single sequence of a film, but there are various levels of attitude that Lola and Amy display that aid in the notion that Marlene Dietrich is an actress whose characters are not necessarily crass or overtly sexual as much as they are attempting to find liberation and independence.

What has not been examined in existing literature is whether these elements can be read as ones which are endowed with the kind of visual or stylized meaning that centers on Dietrich's characters gaining some form of liberation and/or resistance to the oppressive world within the story. Zucker asserts that Sternberg's "movement toward fantasy is reinforced by the lighting and the sets, but particularly by the vertiginous and bizarre alterations of Marlene Dietrich's costumes" (15). Thus, I explore ways in which these "alterations" create meanings according to power relations established in the world of the films. My investigation into the various levels of empowerment within Dietrich's characters will seek to define the ways her costumes function based on a more recent feminist paradigm of power developed by scholar Amy Allen.

The analysis of costume is useful to this project because, according to Sybil DelGaudio's 1992 text, *Dressing the Part: Sternberg, Dietrich and Costume*, style signifies the various characteristics within the personalities of Lola-Lola and Amy Jolly. In Sternberg films, she says, costumes are used self consciously as signs to disguise, masquerade, mask, cross-dress, role-play, perform striptease, and ornament. They figure largely Sternberg's narrative and thematic conflicts. I use some of this terminology as a way to more clearly define the significance of costuming Dietrich as a way to determine the various dynamics of power within *The Blue Angel* and *Morocco*.

Costumes mark the transition of Dietrich's characters from persons experiencing levels of domination into situations of empowerment and solidarity. DelGaudio acknowledges that in the 1930s, Dietrich's image was contrived simultaneously as the object of the male gaze and as an image of power, specifically defining the relationship

between audience and idol in *The Blue Angel*. DelGaudio analyzes the ways in which an idol is displayed for consumption and yet is also inaccessible. I take DelGaudio's idea further and discuss how Dietrich's two cabaret performers become powerful as a result of their performances of being on display, yet both women can control who has access to them and can deny men of attention. DelGaudio asserts that *The Blue Angel* costumes work as signifiers that redefine the female image on screen. She claims that "Sternberg uses costume signs to suggest resemblance to the natural world while simultaneously foregrounding difference" (29). I discuss the difference in terms of class distinction, power relationships or economic status of both of the women being analyzed.

While Zucker's article deals mostly with the film *Shanghai Express*, it does mention *Morocco* and the cabaret scenes within it. The article briefly focuses on how Sternberg directs Dietrich. Zucker notes the differences between good theatre acting and good film acting, and that Sternberg does not edit his films as often as other directors of the period; therefore the performer is in the center of the action--and in this case the performer is Dietrich. Zucker states:

Dietrich's act in Sternberg's films is a consistent entity: The characters she plays retain approximately the same characteristics in each scenario. She is cynical and jaded; her world-weariness is a product of love affairs apparently destroyed by the faithlessness of the male partner. She is saved by her wisdom (in the face of male stupidity) courage and loyalty in the name of love. This is Dietrich's act. (20)

Her "act", according to Zucker, enables her to be morally superior and find success in the narrative. Dietrich's acting style is not realistic, but Dietrich is "set" to look inertly postured, and her face is rarely animated. She speaks with slow pauses and her responses

may seem premeditated. Ultimately, the acting is all a part of the visual style and aural design of a Sternberg film where she maintains an air of mystery.

Carole Zucker and Sybil DelGaudio are not the only theorists to have extensively published analysis of Sternberg's cinematic Marlene Dietrich. James Naremore continues the discussion of Dietrich/Sternberg collaboration in "Marlene Dietrich" by defining three ways in which to read their films. 1) In terms of "The Hollywood narrative" 2) the decadent, largely male homosexual art of the 1890s and 3) the military glamour and whips-and-bondage display of urban Germany. He claims that Dietrich's work with Sternberg involves what Nietzsche and Freud, called "[the] transvaluation of values. Neither a realist nor a comic, Dietrich inhabits a realm where visible artifice becomes a sign of authenticity. She also challenges our ability to judge her acting skill because her image is unusually dependent on a controlled, artful *mise en scène*"(1).

However, Naremore's reference to *mise-en-scène* and his views of Marlene's image on screen are no more original or different than previous writers. He views Dietrich as a creation of Sternberg, that her rise to fame was never really maintained after she stopped working with him. His consideration of issues of power is implicit in his assessment of the enduring allure that is Marlene Dietrich's characters' sexuality. "These women are a fine balance of irony and fusion of the androgyny seen in Berlin cabaret" (Naremore 5). My own investigation seeks to reveal what levels of empowerment Dietrich's image invoke according to Allen's views on domination, resistance and solidarity. In effect, my thesis focuses on the beginning stage of Dietrich's career and

how the first two Sternberg films in which she starred communicate levels of resistance to the definition of her potent screen image as a disempowered object.

Chapter Two: Methodology

Power and gender relations are crucial concepts for feminists. We are interested in analyzing power because we are interested in understanding, critiquing and ultimately challenging the vast array of unbalanced power relations affecting women in contemporary societies. While power relations can generally be seen as political and philosophical issues, there are disciplinary outlets in the artistic endeavors of society that often either mirror or frame women's roles. Arts such as literature, film, music and fashion are just a few of the many entities that often document and influence how women see themselves and how women hope to progress in the future. The arts allow for experimentation with new interpretations of identity and self, all within the safe confines of a space, be it in film, on the stage, or in a photograph. These forms also connect to various levels of power. Today, feminists can be seen as striving to achieve shifts within these vast influences, so women can become more autonomous. We seek to isolate, translate and ultimately understand what is happening to women's roles and in women's lives.

In her book, *The Power of Feminist Theory: Domination, Resistance and Solidarity*, feminist theorist, Amy Allen, seeks to explore the concepts that define power relations for women in order to enable feminists to more specifically categorize the dynamic changes leading to empowerment. Allen is a professor and Chair of Philosophy at Dartmouth College. She is a member of three philosophical organizations: the Critical Theory Roundtable, the Colloquium on Philosophy and the Social Sciences in Prague, plus the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy. In the last ten years,

Allen has written about power relations and agency. Her analysis deconstructs the works of Michel Foucault, Hannah Arendt and Judith Butler. She shows how identity can be both defined and circumscribed by power relations when one is the individual subject, yet be capable of solidarity with others amidst social and contextual limitations. In her most recent book, *The Politics of Our Selves*, she makes a significant and vital contribution to feminist theory and to critical social theory by confronting the phenomenon of subjection and the challenges it poses for the critical conception of autonomy. What is particularly illuminating about her theories is that she sees power as a relational/relationship based experience and not something that can be distributed or possessed in and of itself, in isolation. She sees the agency that women can have despite a downtrodden situation and creates a context in which to define how women take ownership of their own lives instead of existing as victims in a patriarchal society. Her work defines the relational elements of power by providing a specific set of terminology that aids in the examination of power within female experience. Her goal is to help feminists articulate what they are interested in when they seek to comprehend, critique and contest the subordination of women.

For the purposes of this thesis, the terminology that Allen has created is used for a feminist textual analysis of two Marlene Dietrich films: *The Blue Angel* (1929) and *Morocco* (1930). I selected these two films because they are the first films that Marlene Dietrich starred in that were directed by Josef von Sternberg. In both films, she plays a cabaret performer, and both of her characters experience journeys that illuminate Allen's feminist concept of power relations and are in turn illuminated by it. *The Blue Angel* was

one of Germany's first sound films and was released in Europe in 1929. *Morocco* was the first Dietrich/Sternberg film released in the United States, and it earned Oscar nominations for Sternberg, Dietrich, her costar, Emil Jannings, and cinematography. After the success of *Morocco*, Sternberg, Paramount and the UFA studios decided to release *The Blue Angel* in the United States. After that, Dietrich and Sternberg would create five more films together, but none had the same success of the first two films, and the stories are remarkably different. I chose to restrict my discussion to the first two films because their stories seem to intertwine and illuminate each other with regard to male and female relationships. At the end of *The Blue Angel*, a man succumbs to a woman's charms and at the end of *Morocco*, as it may seem, a woman has become overpowered by a man. Critic Andrew Sarris' Museum of Modern Art monograph on Sternberg's films states, "If *The Blue Angel* is about a man brought down by love, then *Morocco* is in some sense its reversal. Professor Unrat is destroyed by love; it defines and redeems Amy Jolly. She doesn't need expensive gifts; she needs to love a man without conditions" (Bach 133). In addition, both films feature Marlene Dietrich singing and performing more songs in her well-known cabaret style than in the other five films. She sings four songs during *The Blue Angel* and two songs in *Morocco*. For these reasons and in the interests of limiting my discussion to manageable proportions, I have chosen to restrict my analysis to these two films.

The terms I use throughout my analysis are *domination, resistance/empowerment, solidarity, feminist power, gender and performativity*. These concepts are distinct and yet are not mutually exclusive. Allen's terminology is a filter through which to deconstruct

power relationships in *The Blue Angel* and *Morocco* and examine how those relationships contribute to the development of Dietrich's characters.

Allen's conception of power relationships is based on the notion that shrewd ambitions can be born out of the dominating circumstances that create an oppressed female. Although Allen's theory is used to analyze women in real life, for the purposes of this thesis, I am applying her terminology to the narratives of two characters. In this case; a subjected female character is one who is dominated by aspects of patriarchal society. For instance, when women are expected to look aesthetically pleasing, perform as an object of beauty, and fulfill a male image of desire, they are experiencing the power dynamics that are a result of male domination. Allen describes domination as power over: "the ability of an actor (character) or set of actors to constrain the choices available to another set of actors in a nontrivial way." (123) The claim that an actor or set of actors (meaning people in real life, not performers) exercises power over another or other people will also depend on the context of the situation. In the case of this investigation, the contexts are the worlds created by Josef von Sternberg: I examine how his filmed cabaret performances of Marlene Dietrich express various levels of limitation within the lives of the central characters that she portrays. Specifically, Allen writes:

The definition of power over is broad enough that it can include both decisions and nondecisions of characters in the films. An actor may constrain the choices of another either by making a direct decision that she will have to accommodate or by intentionally or unintentionally maintaining a course of action that limits the set of options from which she will be able to choose. (124)

Domination, or power-over, is seen as a constraint on the relational potential of a character that may initially seem to work to her disadvantage. In Allen's view, there are limitations in place because of socio-economic or cultural norms that create a crucible in which the central character's ability to resist these limitations will aid in her empowerment, despite these circumstances.

To think of power solely as domination is to neglect the potential for resistance. As Allen states, resistance, or power-to, means that a character can take that which can be seen as degrading or objectifying and turn the experience into a beneficial situation. Specifically, she says, "It is the capacity of an agent to act in spite of or in response to the power wielded over her by others" (125). An agent is the oppressed female, and her ability to "act" in this case means that she creates a context, which will empower her and give her the choices she needs in order to find the freedoms she seeks. With regard to Dietrich's characters, this thesis focuses on the turning points that her characters experience and how they achieve a level of resistance by taking on the oppressive situations in which they are living. Other theorists that Allen references in her theory consider gender to be a determining factor in the dynamics regarding power and women. For instance, when Allen discusses Carole Pateman's perspectives on power theory, she states, "The patriarchal construction of the difference between masculine and feminine is the political difference between freedom and subjection" (76). In other words, to be male means to be free and to be female means to be subjected and treated like an object. Yet with regard to resistance of that subjection, women can take the situations that dominate

them and become empowered by the very roles that they have assumed in patriarchal culture. For example:

The conception of power as empowerment is based on the contention that women have special skills and traits that have been devalued by misogynist cultures; women are said to place a greater emphasis on care and on the maintenance of relationships. Feminists embrace this concept and use it as a feminist [envisioning] of society. (18)

According to Allen, Pateman sees an empowering value in traditional feminine contributions to society and argues that attention must finally be paid to what women give to the worlds in which they function.

And since women are seen as individuals who prioritize relationships (either romantic and platonic), a feminist envisioning of society would involve the kind of power that is seen and exercised as relational power. For example, the mother-child relationship can then be seen as empowering instead of a role that limits a woman's options.

Mothering can be seen as an empowering social practice, one that empowers both the mother and child. Likewise, roles that at first seem degrading, such as the centerfold in a magazine or a night club singer/pop star, (roles that require women to be aesthetically pleasing according to cultural expectations), use their earnings and get an education, buy a home or create a business. These women use their beauty to amass their own financial security, which will give them the power of the men who once dominated them. Then they have the power to empower themselves and other women.

Ultimately, Amy Allen seeks to find a way in which feminists can work collectively as a group so that there can be positive social change. This proactive social change is embodied with her third category, solidarity. The concept of solidarity,

according to Allen, exists in the wake of concerns that the mainstream feminist movement has largely marginalized women of color, lesbians, and working-class women. As a result, feminists must be able to develop a perspective and perception of power that a diverse group of women can exercise collectively when striving for feminist aims. According to Allen, interest in collective power with the goal of female empowerment arises out of our need to understand how feminists can build coalitions with other social movements: racial equality, gay rights, and/or new labor unions.

Allen conceptualizes solidarity and calls it *power-with*. She defines power as a human experience or process, not a thing that some individuals possess and others do not. This is not to say that she is seeking a theory that would require inherent sameness or a loss of identity. The incomplete aspects of earlier feminist views of power focus solely on either male domination or female empowerment. Her feminist conception of power centers around the notion that:

[We] must be able to make sense of masculine domination, feminine empowerment and resistance, and feminist solidarity and coalition building. Yet these different sorts of power relations do not fall under the same sense of the general term power. Rather, each of these represents a particular way of exercising power. (123)

Allen seeks a model in which women can achieve power in order to free themselves from oppressive situations and help other women to do the same. Ultimately, power-with is a way in which women are inspired to not only be empowered, but to empower others also.

Given the parallels within *The Blue Angel* and *Morocco* and Amy Allen's theory regarding feminist empowerment, it is appropriate to adapt the power theory that Allen has developed in order to more closely examine Dietrich's most famous screen personas.

Specifically, I examine two aspects of mise-en-scène, i.e. costumes and the body language and gestures of Marlene Dietrich's characters in *Blue Angel* and *Morocco* in order to analyze the extent to which those characters are empowered according to Amy Allen's definitions of domination, resistance and solidarity. In my analysis I discuss character and plot development throughout the two films, but I also consider the sequences involving cabaret performances as privileged moments within those narratives because, as performances within those worlds, costume and Dietrich's movements and gestures draw attention to themselves as elements that empower Dietrich's characters. That is, I am interested specifically in the ways in which costume, body language, and gesture are used as narrative markers that indicate a growing sense of self-determination and free choice in Dietrich's characters, even as they also mark her sexually attractive and alluring.

The cabaret sequences will be analyzed in terms of how they reveal the level of social and economic status of Marlene Dietrich's characters and reflect transitions and changes within their status. The musical performances will be examined by focusing on the central character's experiences of domination, resistance through empowered actions and her characters' discovery of solidarity with others. The inherent contradictions within the films and the cabaret performances will help to define and determine the extent to which Marlene Dietrich's characters reveal paradoxical behaviors and how the transitions within the stories display recurring motifs of domination, resistance and solidarity according to Allen's model. Ultimately, my argument points to Dietrich's characters as both objects, as women who work within, resist and ultimately articulate

free will, choice, and self-determination within a patriarchal system of representation and sexual commodification. However, it is only by going beyond the now-traditional boundaries of purely psychoanalytic feminist film theory that the empowerment of Dietrich's characters may be fully appreciated-hence, the utility of Allen's model and my application of it in the ensuing chapters.

Chapter 3: “A Frölich towards Empowerment”: Naughty Lola and Her Resistance to Domination

About a hundred years ago the ruins of a monumental temple were found in a steaming Cambodian jungle. Those who had worshiped there must have prayed to the wrong gods, for the race vanished, and what is left of Angkor Vat must crumble too. When I was there huge trees were encircling its remains with their giant roots as if to crush what was left. An army of sculptors had engraved a legend on its wall, which shows Vishnu churning a sea of milk with the aid of a legion of demons on one side, and with numberless monkeys, led by Hanuman, on the other. The myth that this commotion illustrates has it that the ocean was agitated for a thousand years to bring to its tossing surface a woman who was to charm the world. Not much more than a few weeks were at my disposal for a similar feat, and I had very few to help, though I did have a turbulent ocean. It was Berlin, in the fall of 1929.

-Josef von Sternberg, *Fun in a Chinese Laundry* (227)

Josef von Sternberg's ocean of Berlin in 1929 helped unveil Marlene Dietrich to the world. Her first starring role was in *The Blue Angel*. It tells the story of local Professor Immanuel Rath's fall from grace as he pines for a cabaret star named Lola Frölich. Lola-Lola, as she is called, is nothing more than a cabaret performer in a Berlin styled 'Amusierkabarett' where working class people visit to guzzle down beer, sing along to naughty German songs and get a chance to stare at Lola's racy costumes. What transpires within Sternberg's choreography of body language, gestures, costume choices and sensual cabaret scenes is a story of a seemingly harmless woman witnessing the break down of a tyrannical pedagogue while she empowers herself through the cunning use of the performance of her sexual confidence. Lola successfully resists the very dominant forces of socio-economic limitations that on the surface seem to control her. She empowers herself quite unassumingly while working in a nightclub in a pair of lacy pants. Much to the initial surprise of the controlling professor, who, at first wishes to shut

her down with the Blue Angel Cabaret, he falls for her quite hopelessly. Consequently, the film anticipates Rath's eventual demise as a result of his own failures as a leader and educator in his classroom since he ruins his reputation as a strict, moral and principled member of his community when he decides to run away with a showgirl. This entire saga of tormented romance between the professor and the singer is played out in the world of the German cabaret during the years of 1925 to 1929. The film stars prominent members of the German cabaret tradition of that time (Kurt Gerron and Rosa Valetti), highlights songs written by Friedrich Hollander, and is considered to be, according to Lisa Appignanesi in her book, *The Cabaret* the most authentic albeit fictionalized record of the erotic and stinging satirical atmosphere of Weimar Republic Kabarett. And while the German tradition for cabaret performance often featured men dressed as women and women dressed as men, what transpires in the film instead of androgynous clothing are role reversals where the man is submissive and subservient to the female and the female takes control as a result of her sexual liberation. That liberation is a result of and performed during the cabaret numbers.

At the beginning of *The Blue Angel*, Sternberg uses precisely choreographed gestures and symbolic costume to establish the tyrannical and self-righteous personality of Professor Rath. Rath's opening gesture at his desk symbolizes how he makes himself the center of attention within his classroom. Before he even begins the class, he makes his presence known with an imposing and overbearing gesture of taking out his handkerchief, carefully unfolding it and loudly blowing his nose in it. This gesture reveals how Rath imposes himself onto the class and assumes that he is superior to the

rest of the people in the room. He displays the dominating behavior that Amy Allen defines as, “The ability to constrain the choices available to another person by either making a direct decision that limits the set of options from which he or she will be able to [make] choices” (124). Rath consistently restrains his pupils and places limitations on them by either making himself the center of attention or by using tactics of force and intimidation. Once he sees post cards of Lola Frölich taking precedence over his lessons he becomes punitive and violent. Zucker explains that:

Rath’s classroom is defined by the rigidity and constraint of its social order, in the demarcation between student and teacher areas. His costume is significant because, although the film takes place in the 1920s his clothing is antiquated---it belongs to the previous century. (48-49)

Rath is not only outdated in his perspectives on teaching his students but also with regard to the unnecessary rigidity that he places upon his students. For example, when Rath begins to review *Hamlet* with his students, he calls on a particular student to recite Hamlet’s “To be or not to be” speech. When his German student has trouble pronouncing “the” in the speech, Rath focuses on this error by using intimidation and humiliation. He yells in the boy’s face in order to make him fearful. He puts a pencil in the boy’s mouth to correct the pronunciation; which symbolizes rape according to Dr. Werner Sudendorf, noted film historian, curator of the Marlene Dietrich Museum in Berlin, and narrator of *The Blue Angel* DVD. Rath continues to focus on how the young man says the word “the” instead of allowing the boy to at least finish reciting the speech and then teaching the speech’s significance. When Rath’s impatience makes him stop his intimidation of the boy, he gives an essay assignment to entire class. The essay prompt is

“Explain what the play *Julius Caesar* would have been like without Marc Antony’s speech.” Here, Rath goes from one unfulfilled assignment to another. He never teaches anything, he merely patronizes and dictates orders. Rath’s tyrannical teaching methods are concerned with the rote memorization of facts not the consideration of the deeper meaning. This inadequacy within his teaching style foreshadows Rath’s inability to be perceptive about behavior in real life.

In addition to his poor teaching ability, Rath’s clothes also reinforce his assumption of superiority. His outdated costume labels him as nothing more than an arrogant man unwilling to grow or change with the times. He is self-righteous and as he strolls around the room, with his hands behind his back, surveying his domain, the viewer sees that his gestures indicate a man who demands submission to his will instead of creating an academic community.

The costumes and gestures performed in Lola’s world within *The Blue Angel* Cabaret communicate freedom of sensuality and individuality, a stark contrast to Rath’s classroom. While Rath symbolizes the strict bourgeois middle class of Germany before the fall of its economy and government, Lola Frölich is the force symbolizing freedom of sexuality, creativity and a bohemian lifestyle. (Lola’s last name Frölich means “happy” while Rath’s last name, when pronounced with a German accent sounds like rat.) Lola’s costumes not only create a sense of titillation and sensuality, but they also allow her to empower herself despite their obvious portrayal of her as an object for the fulfillment of male sexual fantasy. Allen’s model of resistance and empowerment would allow us to understand Lola’s costumes as the means by which she gains power to freely express who

she is and gain financial advantages as a popular performer. Her costumes expose her legs with stockings and garter belts. She wears her sequined and feathered costume in order to configure herself as a product for sale within the cabaret. Nothing is forbidden in Lola's world as it might be in Rath's. Zucker remarks:

Lola is then viewed from the waist down; her abbreviated black-spangled costume exposes her stockinged legs and garters. Lola sways from side to side, shifting her weight from hip to hip...The figure of Cupid, the god of sexual love, presides over the scene; a cupid points to Lola's sex, the commodity on sale at the cabaret. Lola's costume is her uniform; it is designed to sell her body, which is her business. (49)

This moment is an example of Lola resisting domination of being relegated to a sexual object and using her situation as a way to empower herself through the use of performance. At the beginning of the film, Sternberg establishes that Lola is a sexual object for sale and Rath is an outdated judgmental prude who seeks to break down the sexual curiosity of his students. Lola shows power with her confident stride bearing her hands on her hips and sauntering on the stage without a concern for how she looks or a worry if her performance is sensuous enough. Her goal is to take charge through a captivating performance. Her movement and singing communicates that she is in control of her space, the cabaret. Her power comes from being a pleasing image but resistant to being seen as merely a prostitute. For Lola being a prostitute would mean that she is waiting for a person to be interested in her, but Lola does not wait. People wait to see her. Instead she becomes a sensuous performer whose candid performance gives her the audience's full attention. She is in control of the stage and the people who work there support her as the superior body within the event.

Another way that Lola is revealed as a character that has freedom of individuality and sensuality is when she sings her first song, “Lola.” The song is one that depicts a sexually liberated and charming woman who is able to protect herself if necessary. The lyrics are the first words we hear Lola Frölich say. In the comical song, written by Hollander, she shares racy secrets about her sexual escapades and makes no apologies for her life. The song is like a confession but with no sense of shame or consciousness of sin committed.

They call me naughty Lola,
I'm the lovely Lola.
I have a pianola
that is my joy and pride.

They call me naughty Lola,
The men all go for me.
But I don't let just any man
Lay a paw on my keys!
If any of you louts,
Try to get too near,
I'll punch you in the ribs,
And bang you on the ear!

They call me naughty Lola
The wisest girl on earth.
At home my pianola gets played
for all its worth!
Now I tell you a secret,
don't hammer on the keys.
'Cause my little pianissimo
is always bound to please!

Lola's song is a testimony to her personality and the kind of lover she plays in the cabaret setting. She claims to be “naughty” and yet she also claims to be selective about with whom she will be naughty. She says she won't “let just any man lay a paw on [her] keys!” She confesses that she is indeed experienced with men when she exclaims that

she is “the wisest girl on earth” and that her “pianola gets played for all its worth.” But in the end she is bragging and prideful when she freely ends the song with her own brand of bravado, undoubtedly closing the sale, by singing, “my little pianissimo is always bound to please!” Allen’s notion of the performativity of gender allows us to understand Lola’s objectification by the male gaze at the cabaret. As Allen states:

The theory of performativity avoids determinism because it views individuals as capable of performing heterosexist norms in such a way as to make them into site of parodic contest and display. We may accomplish a subversion of compulsory heterosexuality by performing parodically. (Allen 68)

Lola performs her gender in a humorous parody of heterosexuality. The upbeat song makes light of Lola’s sexual adventures and spins the moment into entertainment. By performing in a parodic manner, the heteronormative stereotype of a prostitute becomes reinvented into a liberating cabaret performance by a woman of indeterminate sexual identity. Lola does not degrade herself, but instead empowers herself to satirize her “naughty” reputation into an act that helps her become more of an artist and less of a prostitute. She makes no apologies and is not shy about her desires or sexual experiences. She “performs” a character that does have the same name as her own, while singing her song; her character is publically intimate and truthful with her audience. This performance of an empowered cabaret artist gives Lola the freedom to establish her life on her own terms outside of the cabaret. Her cabaret performance is how she becomes financially independent and insures that she will be the top performer at The Blue Angel. Her gestures communicate self confidence and a lifestyle free of shame.

Both Professor Rath and Lola Frölich can be viewed as polar opposites of each other through the filter of Allen's theory of domination, resistance and solidarity. Rath's conservative styles of clothing and exaggerated gestures are used to define him as a character that initially seems to possess authority and the ability to dominate others. He controls the classroom with a manner that is befitting of a man who places limitations onto his pupils. He thinks of himself as the ultimate deciding factor in his students' lives. For example, when he discovers that a group of his students are more interested in pictures of Lola than his curriculum, he berates them, punishes them with an extremely hard assignment and follows the group to the cabaret to shame the boys for their sexual curiosity. Though Rath is an educated white male and is a role model for his students, he prides himself on being the ultimate disciplinarian even if he is cruel. According to Allen:

Discipline makes individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise. Individuals are subject to disciplinary power, which is exercised over them and subtly and insidiously constrains their viable options. (Allen 36)

Rath's intentions are to constrain the options of his students and as a disciplinarian he also acts as if he is morally superior to them. Further, Rath seeks to suffocate his students' sexual curiosity and immediately degrade them when they show interest in Lola. However, his self-righteousness and assumed moral superiority are all but lost as soon as he enters Lola's world. And later on, Lola will become Rath's disciplinarian, which corresponds to Allen's view of Lola's path of resistance towards her own empowerment.

For Lola Frölich her circumstances at the beginning of the story seem more constrained because she is in a position of a prostitute, who also sings. Her work in the cabaret, according to her, is art. In reality, according to her “pimp” Kiepert, she is there for men who pay for her. These circumstances create a situation of domination since her choices are limited to what money she can make with her body and her appearance. As Zucker points out in her analysis of this particular scene, Lola’s financial situation is contingent on her performance skills.

Lola’s professional status is revealed unmistakably in her exchange with Kiepert when he informs her that she has ‘funny ideas’ about her profession. Lola thinks of herself as an artiste, but the reality is among the girls at the Blue Angel, she is top dog. Her artistry communicates itself in her ability to trade her ‘assets’ to the greatest advantage. (50)

Lola’s level of power can be read several ways during the beginning of *The Blue Angel*. First she is a more dominated character because she is not independent and she must wear risqué costumes that reduce her to a sexual object in order to make money. Also, she must follow Kiepert’s orders to be with men when they ask for her since they are paying for her time and the alcohol. However, Lola also is in a stage of what Allen calls resistance to the very situations that dominate her since she is “the top dog” in her circles at the cabaret and she can achieve success trading in her “assets”. She does achieve a level of solidarity with the girls, but in a way she also will slowly develop into a leader since she becomes the star of the show. Plus, she ends up rejecting a wily drunk sailor during the second night she sees Rath. Her rejection of the sailor reinforces that she has the potential to assert herself in situations when she feels she can defend herself, “If

someone [uninvited] lays a paw on her keys!” Lola is able to subvert the authority that Kiepert has over her and she uses her sexy costumes to her financial advantage. She employs the concept that Catherine Constable calls, “playing a character who succeeds in a man’s world and does so by using the resources of femininity gaining success on her own terms” (4). It is important to note that Constable has analyzed three other films from the Dietrich/Sternberg cycle (*Shanghai Express*, *Devil Is a Woman* and *Scarlett Empress*) and sees the Dietrich characters as ones who “offer something very different from current representations of the female hero”(4).

Another indication of Lola’s empowerment is her cabaret costumes. The costumes reveal a level of sexuality that is endowed with honesty and freedom to live without repression. Once Rath enters the world of the Blue Angel cabaret, he is at first there to take charge and interrogate; however, as a result of Lola’s confidence with her sexuality and diverse sexual experience, she gradually begins to break down Rath’s domineering and judgmental nature, and the costumes are all a part of her empowered performance. This is evidenced in Lola’s second cabaret outfit. She wears an altered eighteenth-century costume of the French upper class. Her costume is outdated, just as Rath’s is outdated. But hers is a costume meant for a sexy and a slightly satirical show. It mocks the very ideals that Rath and the snobbish German middle class represent. As DelGaudio observes:

[Lola’s] costume details connote rigidity, dignity and seriousness, but Sternberg alters it significantly. When Lola turns her back to the audience, the costume is revealed as backless and her buttocks and legs are on display to both the cabaret audience and the film audience. (34)

Lola's image is one of physical freedom as she ridicules, through her cabaret performance, the very ideals that are similar to Rath. The backless French costume reveals her lacy panties and her way of turning her back to the audience is bold, confident and playful. Her comfort level with regard to showing off her body while ridiculing the privileged class communicates the very resistance that continues to empower her throughout the film.

Lola's comfort level begins to break down Rath's ability to intimidate others when she changes her clothes in his presence after he pushes his way into her dressing room. She removes her courtly skirt and ascends the staircase to her boudoir. Afterwards, she takes off her lacy ruffled panties and throws them down to Rath as they land on his face, while he is looking up. Lola's strip/tease creates a situation where there is sexuality, but there is also degradation of Rath attached to Lola's sexual flirtation. She controls the dynamics within her moments with Rath and her gestures of control foreshadow how Rath's relationship with Lola will be fraught with humiliation and shame. Carole Zucker remarks how "Lola's panties represent her sexuality, however, fetishistically. It is a withholding, because they stand for her sexuality. Lola tantalizes Rath with erotic intimacy while in fact---denying it" (52). Rath never really becomes close to Lola in the scene and she continues to become unavailable and unattainable to him even though they eventually marry.

Lola's increasing development of her sensuous cabaret image not only empowers her as a performer, but it also begins to reduce Rath's ability to seem powerful or intimidating. For instance, when he is in the dressing room with Lola, she enacts a bit

of striptease that humiliates him instead of characterizing him as a sexual being. “The casting off of garments implies a promise that is essentially undelivered by Lola” (Zucker 35). After Rath acquires Lola’s panties, Rath’s sexuality is revealed to be more boyish and immature because Lola’s behavior with Rath becomes a continuation of the cabaret performance. In Rath’s presence, Lola is confident and truthful about her sexuality and Rath is only made to feel uncomfortable with her expressive sexual behavior. Allen’s application of Foucaultian power relationships to feminist ideals allows us to view Lola’s honesty about her sexuality as a form of gradual empowerment.

Power operates in and through the practice of confession both to subject individuals to the injunction to tell the truth about their sexuality and to enable them to take up the position of sexual object. According to Foucault, the practice of confession incites us to confess our secrets, our desires, our pleasures and our darkest thoughts. (36)

For instance through her confession performance of the song “Falling in Love Again”, she is confessing and revealing her desires while also being a sexual object. However, this kind of honesty gives her power because she is not ashamed of the character she portrays. In addition, through the elements of resistance she acquires power as a result of being comfortable with her sexuality through the costumes she wears during her cabaret performances. Her sexually charged clothing is another form of confession and a way of revealing an aspect of her levels of desire. Her cabaret costumes empower her since she shows that she is bold and not afraid to wear them. Also, in the role of performer she gains power through the songs she sings because her act gives her money and the opportunity to use and express her sexuality within the realm of a performance space.

Her cabaret style sells more alcohol and brings in more crowds. Ultimately, Lola becomes a controlling force because of her performance techniques.

Lola's empowering performance in the cabaret gives her the confidence to control Rath so that he begins to relinquish his power. He shows a shy childish nature when Lola assertively asks him why he has not taken off his hat when they first meet. His clothing implies that he is proper and conservative, but he still wears his hat in her presence. Lola's confrontation of Rath constrains his ability to intimidate or constrain her. He can neither use violence, since she is putting on the "act" of a lady, nor can he take charge of the situation by being sexually aggressive or confident, because he presents himself as a controlling disciplinarian setting out to rid the town of filth. And so, Lola's act is how she takes charge of her situation with Rath. He has lost control of the situation and no longer is a disciplinarian or a controlling force once he enters her dressing room in a futile attempt to intimidate her. Zucker explains that:

Lola throws Rath's limited strategy off by not only refusing to accept the role he has assigned her, but also by reminding him that he is abrogating the basic codes of his implied role, that of the gentlemen. Lola compels Rath to acknowledge her as a lady. At the same time she punctures his self-presentation. (53)

Lola successfully humbles the professor by using her femininity as a form of empowerment. Amy Allen would call this a moment of resistance since Lola is being approached by a known authority figure from an educational institution, yet she is merely a showgirl type who has no educational authority. This moment is an example of resistance according to Allen's model because Lola employs her feminine charm in order to take control of the scene and expects Rath to adhere to basic codes of chivalry by

taking his hat off in the presence of a female. Also, at this point she uses the socially acceptable codes of moral behavior that Rath pretends to employ and she subverts her limitations to shift the power in her favor. He now cannot control her because she does not let him. He attempts to oppress her by talking to her in a tone that implies that she is inferior, but she does not agree with or accept that role. Here, Lola can freely reveal her sexuality and her comfort with her sexual desires. Even German film Historian Werner Sudendorf, in his narration of *The Blue Angel* DVD, claims that Lola demonstrates a free nature and an unrepressed attitude about her sexuality. “She knows no shame and she has no secrets. Unlike Professor Rath.” What is also important to notice is that Lola still expects to be treated with respect despite her lifestyle and previous sexual experiences.

The more Lola uses and establishes her role as a cabaret artist, the more sexually desirable she is and ultimately the more resistant she becomes to the dominating behavior of others. Her continued success as a cabaret performer empowers her to resist the initial socio-economic constructs that seem to oppress her. She is not a business owner, she does not have a husband or any family, but she is now accruing a reputation as an entertainer, which will give her employment and money. Allen calls this situation power-to. Lola is steadily gaining the mobility to improve her socio-economic status and her costumes during her cabaret performances help her to achieve success. One of the more iconic costumes that Lola wears for her cabaret style is the one that is most often displayed on film posters for *The Blue Angel*. Dietrich wears a short black satin dress and a white top hat. The white top hat is symbolic of male empowerment and economic superiority. (Dietrich wears top hats later on in *Morocco* and *Blonde Venus* during

pivotal moments within those films as well.) The black dress is strung with wire in the front so that the skirt is permanently lifted up to reveal her ruffled panties. This wire in her skirt parodies the fetishistic male fantasy of wanting to look up her skirt, but it is also funny. When Rath returns the following evening to give Lola the panties he accidentally took (his student secretly placed them in his pocket) he has a decidedly more demure and respectful tone with Lola than in earlier scenes. She makes him serve her and treat her with respect. By enlisting his help as she applies her stage make up; Lola takes control of the relationship with Rath. This action humbles him since he knows nothing about make up or feminine accessories and she is making him help her in the same way his students did earlier in the film. She also lowers Rath's guard and reduces his potential for domination of other people. Allen explains this kind of resistance/empowerment:

Although particular instances of resistance may take the form of placing constraints on the options of the would-be aggressor, resistance seems fundamentally to involve asserting one's capacity to act in the face of the domination of another agent. (125)

In this pivotal scene, Lola becomes more empowered as she performs basic rituals of femininity (e.g. getting dressed for the show, putting on make up and fixing her hair). These rituals give her an air of charm. As she readies herself, she imparts maternal behaviors, which constrain the options of the aggressive nature of Rath. She combs his messy hair and she jokes that he stays under her dressing table too long (staring at her legs) while he picks up dropped cigarettes. In a final act of resistance that disarms Rath's potentially masculine behavior, she blows powdered make up onto his face. His reaction to the smoke of powder surrounding him indicates Lola's ability to quickly disarm and

blind Rath with the very feminine trappings that she possesses. Dr. Sudendorf even remarks, “When she blows powder on him, engulfing him, she thus completes Rath’s transformation into a small boy; which robs him of masculinity and eroticism.” Here, Lola’s charms, which are a part of her cabaret performance techniques, begin to engulf him. This scene foreshadows how Lola will continue to control Rath through tactics of resistance.

Lola’s performance of “Falling in Love Again” not only empowers her as a dynamic and sensuous performer, but the appeal of her performance strips Rath of his ability to control and intimidate others. Lisa Appignanesi, describes Dietrich’s siren character’s insolent sexuality in her book *The Cabaret* as, “[One that is] exercised on all and all the more powerful because it veils a cool impassivity [and] drives Rath further and further into the grip of jealousy” (166). When Lola sings to Rath, he is sitting high above the audience and looking down at Lola and the rest of the cabaret performers. She gazes back at him and he slowly becomes smitten with her. She is able to use her smile, black satin costume and white top hat as a way to put Rath into a trance. Her audience sees her garter belts and the full view of her famous legs and Lola focuses her attention onto Rath during the entire song. Friedrich Hollander wrote the song “Falling in Love Again” especially for Dietrich to perform during the film. The song itself reveals how Lola’s charms disarm Rath’s honor in the eyes of his students. His hypocritical image labels him as a failed role model. Lola is not to blame for Rath’s predicament since he has a choice about how to live his life. She sings:

From head to foot, I'm made for love
 For that is my world and nothing else.
 That is—what can I do—my nature.
 I can only love and nothing else.
 Men cluster round me like moths round a flame
 And if they burn, I'm not to blame.

Falling in love again,
 Never wanted to
 What am I to do?
 I can't help it.

The enigmatic glimmer
 A je-ne-sais-pas-quoi
 Flashes in the eyes of a
 Beautiful woman
 But when my eyes look deeply
 At the man vis-à-vis
 And gaze intently at him
 What does it mean?

Falling in love again,
 Never wanted to.
 What's a girl to do?
 I can't help it.

What choice do I have?
 That's the way I'm made.
 I am not to blame
 I can't help it.

First, the tone of the song, as Dietrich performs it, is very ironic. She sings, “What am I to do?” which implies that she is non-committal and disconnected to the situation. She is not in love. The reality is that she is exercising her power and ability to have a choice in what kind of man she wants when she says, “I can't help it. What choice do I have?” She is not helpless. On the contrary, it is Rath who is helpless along with any other man who is drawn to Lola. The song itself symbolizes the professor's enthrallment, humiliation and his ultimate death. Lola is merely doing what she is born to do, draw men towards

her. She admits everything about herself within this song while continuing to advance as a performer within the cabaret. Allen's model of domination, resistance and solidarity allows us Rath's and Lola's symbiosis at this point in the story as a relationship in which Lola is maintaining her course of action as a form of resistance. Allen states, "An actor's options can be constrained both by the overt behavior of another and by his or her anticipation of the other's negative reaction to his or her options" (124). Lola's stylized performance skills help her improve her socio-economic limitations, but at the same time these talents limit the overt behaviors and freedoms that Rath once possessed. Once he marries Lola, he no longer has control of his options.

Meanwhile, Rath continues to be blind and deaf to the truths that Lola reveals in her song. Her powerful sensuality becomes a force that dominates Rath and softens his tyrannical behavior. Appignanesi claims that the now infamous song "Is saucy [and] has racy tones that are cruelly mingled with irresistible sexuality and impassive promiscuity" (166). The cruelty of the song materializes in the form of the emasculation of Rath. Once Rath watches Lola sing her song he spends the night with her, but the morning after scene indicates Rath's future with Lola. It is a future that employs androgynous behaviors for Rath and Lola.

Lola's increasing success on the cabaret circuit empowers her and transforms her into a dominating presence in Rath's life. Allen's model allows us to view this section of the narrative as Lola's resistance to domination because she now places constraints on Rath, the former aggressor. Rath's desire is what motivates him to be with Lola and to ultimately marry her. He decides to risk his position at the school, quit his job and marry

Lola. The morning he wakes up in her bed foreshadows his fate of powerlessness. There is no evidence of sex or passion, only symbols of Rath continuing to lose his power. As Zucker reveals:

Rath awakens in Lola's bedroom after spending his first night with her. He wakes up cradling a doll in his arm....He awakens the morning after with a child's toy instead of Lola in his arms; he is fully dressed; he is not capable of handling a real 'doll.' Lola's intimations of sexual complicity and tenderness are fraudulent. (Zucker 52)

The doll he cradles indicates that Rath is childlike and vulnerable. Lola has already awakened and puts a doll in his arms to replace her in the bed while she prepared breakfast. The replacement is ultimately patronizing. She flirts and toys with him, but her behavior is a mask for the morning after a wild night of drinking; it is yet another performance, not real love. Rath is too naïve and limited in his life experiences to understand that Lola's behavior is ultimately patronizing. She will constantly leave him to carry her belongings and use him when she needs him.

Another example of costume and body language that point to Rath's domination by Lola's cabaret life is during the scene when he puts on Lola's stockings. Rath must now serve Lola and do as she says. Her stockings and garters are initially to decorate her as an aesthetically pleasing object, but now she is resistant to that sexual objectification and has obtained power as a result of her use of sexuality. Rath, on the other hand is disarmed as a result of Lola's sexual empowerment. Rath has been married to Lola for a year. He is aware of his disempowered situation, which is similar to Lola's socio-economic limitations at the beginning of the film. He is dirty, has not shaved and walks

in a slovenly and sluggish manner. He is broke and is relegated to a life of selling the very cards that he punished his students for staring at while he taught his lessons. As Rath sells the cards he is in a reluctant mood and full of self-loathing. As Andrew Sarris notes about this scene, “It is not Lola who forces the professor to peddle her gamey photos, but rather the financial realities of the situation” (28). Rath cannot earn money to support them but Lola can. His body language of sluggishness and reluctance indicates his awareness of having become a failure. Meanwhile, Lola sings the song: “Beware of Blondes.” The song underscores Rath’s unfortunate reality while the song only makes Lola more appealing and unattainable.

Beware of blonde women,
they’re special, every one!
At first you may be unaware
But something is definitely there.
A little hanky-panky can be fun
But from their clutches
You better run!

Lola sings as Rath somberly serves as her ‘fan club president.’ Rath has become the minion in the world of Lola-Lola. She hides nothing. All the truths about her behaviors are in the song telling the watchers that the “hanky-panky is fun” but one had better free oneself from the siren before one is destroyed. When the song is over Lola comes back to her dressing room and asks Rath to get her stockings. The scene is not titillating; it is about reluctant duty and servitude. “Rath responds to Lola’s command by kneeling before her as she puts out her leg. He places on the stockings just above her knee when she takes over” (Zucker 52). At this point in their relationship, any potential for eroticism is denied and he is merely a worker for Lola. “He performs duties of a slave to

Lola's master, but Lola has ceased to pretend that another kind of alliance is even possible between them" (52). The marriage between Rath and Lola is nothing more than a relationship based on humiliation and denial. Allen's model of power relations point to an understanding of Lola's ability to resist domination, and to her talents as a performer that give her mobility with regard to her financial and artistic success.

In the final scenes of Rath's demise, the power relations have reversed. Lola is in control of her career and has financial success. Meanwhile in his clown costume, Rath's physical expressions of suffering punctuate how he falls prey to his ignorant choices as she evolves into a classier and more established cabaret star. As time elapses, from 1925 to 1929 the group of performers has traveled to various cities, with Lola as the headliner. Rath, unable to support her, must stay with Lola and live off of her earnings. Kiepert reminds Rath that, "You have been living off of Lola for four years!" And so, Kiepert decides to put Rath to work in an act the Kiepert creates which centers around Rath's ability to crow like a rooster. Rath is outraged and with his final scrap of hubris, he claims he will not perform. What is worse about Kiepert's plan is that Rath must perform this humiliation back in his hometown, in The Blue Angel Cabaret while wearing a clown costume in front of the very students he used to shame and judge.

The crowing of Rath and his clown outfit represent two aspects of his utter domination by Lola's success. As the clown, Rath is labeled a fool and while he crows, he is making the sound of a man who is being cuckolded by other men. DelGaudio expands on this moment by explaining that:

His crowing is incorporated into his act as a painful manifestation of his cuckolding and his emasculation.

The rooster and the fool, both symbols of the victimization of a man by an unfaithful woman, have been incorporated into Rath's clown and his humiliation is completed by his forced appearance at a return engagement in his hometown. (DelGaudio 38)

Rath has undergone a complete transformation into a man who cannot earn money, does not have a voice in the community in which he lives his life, and has given up all potential for ever having a future career as a teacher since he married a cabaret performer. His former peers deem him completely unacceptable. Kiepert and Rath both wear top hats in the clown act; however, Kiepert's hat is firm and shiny while Rath is ripped and bent. During the act Kiepert continues to stab the hat to prove that "there is nothing under it," a reference to Rath's limited intelligence since the hat previously symbolized Rath's social and economic status as teacher and leader in his community.

When Lola arrives in the final shot of the film she is dressed in three very tasteful and elegant costumes that represent her sexuality at its most powerful, her financial success and her controlling and determined nature are evident. The first outfit is a leopard print coat with fur trim worn over a form fitting silk dress and a hat. The coat denotes an animal magnetism and confidence along with financial success that wearing fur symbolizes. Catherine Constable discusses fur as a metaphorical device when analyzing Dietrich's character Catherin the Great in *Scarlett Empress* by way of Severin's film *Venus in Furs*. There the furs are symbolic of the woman as a torturess:

The [image] combines a sense of narcissistic self absorption as well as an additional element of coldness and calculation. The furs in which she is enveloped are said to represent 'the tyranny and cruelty that are common to beautiful women. (62)

As Lola wears the coat, she saunters around *The Blue Angel* cabaret and picks up a new man who continues to follow her around and vie for her attention. Her second and third costumes are for her cabaret performances. The second costume is a form-fitting lace on the top of the dress with one full bell sleeve and the other side with the shoulder exposed. The skirt is long and pale and has a floral arrangement in the front. She slithers through the backstage area drinking champagne with her new man; all the while Rath is dressed as a clown. Rath is speechless and frozen. With every flirtation between Lola and the new love interest, Rath becomes more and more frustrated and belittled. Rath is completely defeated.

The closing of the film marks Lola's ascent to the level of ultimate empowerment as she wears her final costume that signifies wisdom and confidence through her more serious rendition of the song "Falling in Love Again." Lola wears a black corset outfit of sequin and satin. She straddles the back of her chair and has her hands folded on the top. According to Allen's model of empowerment, Lola's character has not only achieved resistance to the entities that once limited her, but her costumes communicate a level of solidarity with the rest of her company of performers. Everyone in the troupe of performers is working more often and earning money because of Lola's empowering performance style. The clothes are more expensive and elegant in their design. Her cool and reserved mood indicates a wiser version of Lola than the more playful character that woos Rath. When she sings the song a second time, it is with an air of superiority and emotional truth. Sarris has noted about this second performance:

When Marlene Dietrich sings "Falling in Love Again" for the first time the delivery is playful,

flirtatious and self-consciously seductive. The final rendition is harsher, colder and relentlessly remorseless. The difference in delivery is not related to the old stereotype of the vamp finally showing her true colors, but rather to a psychological development in Lola from mere sensual passivity to a more forceful fatalism about the nature of her desires. (25)

As Sarris points out, Lola displays a wisdom that goes along with her life in the cabaret circuit of performers. Here, we see the stage performance that has been influenced by the events that have taken place backstage; that of her husband becoming the cuckolded failure and reluctantly performing his failure for the audience. She is not to blame for his choices because it was his idea to marry Lola, and he is responsible for the misfortunes of how he has handled his life. Rath attempts to choke Lola after his stage performance, but she gets away and still manages to sing the same evening. DelGaudio notes that Lola has a power in her gesture and final interpretation of the song: “Her posture and her costume are more defiant, and she seems more certain of her own ability to maintain distance as she coldly sings an encore” (39). Like an idol, Lola is inaccessible and can be because she is in control of her life and the choices she makes. She needs no one and is not to blame if “the men are burned by her flame.” She creates empowerment for herself by becoming a successful cabaret artist and creating a following of fans that wish to see her perform.

Elizabeth Bronfen in her 2003 article “Seductive Departures of Marlene Dietrich: Exile and Stardom in *Blue Angel*” notices the shifts in power between Lola and Rath are related to Lola displaying male qualities of empowerment while Rath displays female qualities of being dominated. This transfer of power between Lola and Rath can be

understood through Allen's model of empowerment. Specifically in her text, she references how Judith Butler adopts a Derridean understanding of performativity of gender that can be applied to the Lola/Rath role reversals. Allen's states:

In this reformulated view, the hegemonic cultural definitions that govern the production of sexuality (and thus of sexed bodies) cannot reproduce and sustain themselves; rather, they must be cited or reiterated by individuals in order to be reproduced and sustained. Thus, performativity must be understood as a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. (72)

The previously accepted norms that produce sexuality (and class), in Lola and Rath's cases, would relegate her to a lower socio-economic status than him, that of a prostitute. These norms no longer exist since those norms do not reproduce or sustain themselves in the current state of their relationship. Instead the performativity of these two characters is now reinvented as a result of the newly created process of iterability, a continuous repetition of norms that have given Lola privileges and Rath a subservient position. Lola and Rath's androgynous role reversals ultimately have occurred out of a newly formed contextual situation. In this case the context is the successful cabaret performances and the financial gain that Lola achieves as a result. Her role as a successful cabaret artist is beneficial for her as it continues to empower her, but it only serves to ruin Rath's origins as a conservative professor. Essentially, Lola turns heteronormative beliefs and morals inside out through her honesty with regard to her sexuality. As Bronfen points out:

Thus from the start [Rath] and [Lola's] encounter is not only based on a highly duplicitous relay of gazes but, more importantly, on a theft of power, in the course of which both the spectator and the woman as eroticized object of display oscillate

between sadistic empowerment and masochistic disempowerment. When Rath enters the *Blue Angel*, he is no longer master of his fantasies or his actions. (Bronfen 6)

Lola is the female subject gazed upon for male fantasy and yet through the tactics in her performance style she is able to resist domination and achieve solidarity with her performance troupe. Lola successfully has reinvented herself into a woman who can gaze upon a man and have him serve her during the course of their relationship. Here, Bronfen is remarking that Lola is sadistic and Rath is masochistic, which obviously relates back to Gaylyn Studlar's analysis of Dietrich/Sternberg, though Studlar never analyzed *The Blue Angel*. But Bronfen's perception is problematic in terms of my own observation: Why is it when a woman is in power that it is automatically viewed as negative/sadistic? Why is it when the man is not in a position of power and he stays in the subordinate position that it is automatically called masochism? These assumptions based on traditional psychoanalytic paradigms only devalue the empowered female and the males who follow their lead. Rath chose his life with Lola; it was not forced upon him.

What makes this thesis unique in comparison to previous investigations of *The Blue Angel* is that the later studies fail to state that Rath is not an effective educator. His tactics of constraint and moral superiority are not appropriate in order to gain respect and to teach his students in a manner that inspires learning or a positive attitude towards education. His excessive tyrannical approach to academics is ultimately fruitless because he cannot see beyond the surface. He is by no means a critical thinker and does not promote or model critical thinking. His students rebel against him because they do not respect him and Rath is afraid of life and therefore is not skilled enough to see that Lola

is playing a part, not loving a man. Being unashamed of one's sexuality should not be considered wrong, or in Lola's case, or the boys' case, let alone be seen as an example of sadism or rebellion. Rath's sexual immaturity and lack of street smarts leads to his downfall, not Lola.

In essence this analysis of *The Blue Angel* has deconstructed the notions of power dynamics within a marriage. It initially views the woman as the one who is in a lower socio-economic position and the man in the superior position. Through the course of the story, what ultimately transpires are shifts in power as a result of the woman being more aware and comfortable with her own sexuality and unashamed of her choices. Lola uses her charm and sense of humor to stylize her performance skills as a cabaret singer and success follows. The performativity of gender through song in a cabaret setting, costumes and body language/gesture will continue to be discussed as the next film *Morocco* is analyzed according to Amy Allen's model of feminist empowerment.

Chapter Four: "For She's A Jolly Good Fellow":
The Performance of Independence

Nothing must be as it is so that everything may remain as it was.
-Marlene Dietrich (55)

In Marlene Dietrich's first American film, *Morocco*, nothing is as it seems so that everything in the world of the story remains luminous and mysterious. Dietrich is empowered and independent, with an ending image of her character choosing risk and adventure over security and complacency. The film is about a young nightclub performer, Amy Jolly, using her one-way ticket to Morocco to escape her past. Once she finds success as a performer, she must decide which man she wants--Tom Brown, a young Legionnaire playboy (Gary Cooper) or La Bessiere, (Adolphe Menjou) a wealthy worldly bachelor. What transpires within the exotic locale are cinematic moments in which Dietrich's costumes mimic male bravado, empower her choices, and uplift her sexual prowess. Her walk, gestures and facial expressions indicate a cool reserve of independence and resistance to the forces that initially seem to dominate her. Meanwhile, her still-shocking cabaret performance becomes the catalyst that gives Amy Jolly the choices that grant her character the power to choose the lifestyle she wants. Ultimately, the development of Amy Jolly's empowerment takes place in four sections/locations within the film: the cabaret, her apartment, her dressing room and the engagement dinner. These locations serve as the contexts in which an understanding of Allen's model of power dynamics reveals domination, resistance, empowerment, solidarity, gender and performativity within *Morocco*.

Amy Allen defines levels of power within her feminist philosophy by referencing Michel Foucault. As Allen points out the specific levels of domination, resistance and empowerment he discusses are both prohibitive of and productive for the subject. “For Foucault, power both prohibits and produces; it prohibits by producing and it produces by prohibiting. Production is the same as constraint. And the key effects of this prohibitive/productive power is the ‘subject’” (Allen 36). That is, power constrains expression of self, even as it also catalyzes it. Throughout the story of *Morocco*, there are moments where Amy Jolly, Le Bessiere and Tom Brown, have varying degrees of power and influence over each other. The limitations are actually productive, especially for Amy Jolly. This chapter will focus on how these constraints assist her in becoming an empowered character despite her obvious role of a woman alone in a foreign land without money or a home. It will become clear that while she is dominated by her circumstances, she is capable of resisting and empowering herself and ultimately, as a result of how she performs her gender, she can make the choice to be in solidarity with whomever she chooses.

When *Morocco* opens, Amy Jolly’s dark costume establishes her as a woman who lives on the fringe of society. The establishing shot of her entrance reveals her alone on the bridge of the ship emerging from the fog wearing dark clothing against a backdrop of Arab passengers who are wearing white. From the very beginning of the film she is an independent woman who is in what Allen calls resistance since she seemingly possesses “the individual capacity or ability to act so as to attain some end” (Allen 127). She is traveling on her own to Morocco to “escape the past.” as she says; a past that is never

explained. The ship's captain characterizes her as "a vaudeville actress and a suicide passenger [with a] one-way ticket" (DelGaudio 102). Carrying her suitcase, she enters the scene and is immediately noticed by Le Bessiere. He gives her his business card in order to make a connection with her, no doubt as a suitor, but she quickly rips up the card and is completely uninterested in him. Her clothing in this scene reinforces the notion of her independence, as DelGaudio notes: "Her dark costume, in contrast to the lighter costumes of the Arab passengers conveys her foreignness" (102). The image of Amy Jolly as an outsider reinforces that she is unique, particularly among the women of Morocco. Also her confidence is seen in her ability to reject advances and attention from Le Bessiere. This moment demonstrates a level of empowerment that Allen calls power –to. Amy Jolly demonstrates the ability to have the "capacity of an agent to act in spite of or in response to the power wielded over her by others" (22). Le Bessiere is wealthy and powerful as demonstrated by his crisply tailored trench coat; his familiarity with the captain of the ship and confidence are seen in his stride as he walks towards Amy Jolly. However, Amy reacts to his empowered social status and wealth through what Allen calls resistance. "Although particular instances of resistance may take the form of placing constraints on the options of the would-be aggressor, resistance seems fundamentally to involve asserting one's capacity to act in the face of the domination of another agent" (Allen 125). Here Le Bessiere is an aggressor. The other agent within the scene, though polite in his behavior, he still approaches Amy Jolly as if to control her or even save her, since his money and privilege give him the confidence to attain her. Instead, she coolly

rejects him by saying, “I won’t need any help.” Then she rips his card, not even appeasing him with a glance or a polite facial expression. And then she gets a job.

The Cabaret Nightclub

Amy Jolly’s interactions with her boss and audience, and her costumes in the nightclub section of *Morocco* indicate her ability to resist domination by employing her cool and reserved self-confidence. Her first interaction is with Lo Tinto. While he is her boss and he is the owner of the club, he is sweating, in a rush; and ironically serves Amy throughout their scene together. He tells her that if she can please the crowd, she can work in Morocco for as long as she wants. Allen’s model suggests that Amy Jolly’s situation of lacking income and a home is one that actually produces her empowerment, as these limitations force her to work and gain independence. Her gestures and body language in this scene communicate confidence and self-assured choices while Lo Tinto seems to be a more insecure and subservient character. As Delgaudio observes, “[Amy] displays an unwillingness to expend energy, perhaps thus accounting for her seeming immunity to heat. During the entire take she never glances in his direction. Amy’s actions are economical and masculine” (97-98). Amy remains cool amidst the Moroccan climate and the pressure of being completely on her own and penniless in a foreign land. Her status as a single woman might mark her as a dominated character, one lacking in resources or even relationships to grant her economic stability and safety. However, her economical and masculine gestures symbolize her ability to take care of herself. These actions communicate confidence. She subverts the assumption of needing assistance by what Allen calls “retaining the power to act despite [her] subordination—more

particularly the ability to attain certain ends in spite of [her] subordination” (Allen 126).

Amy achieves power first with her calm and controlled behavior toward Lo Tinto and then by dressing in a tuxedo.

A tuxedo, the traditional attire of economically privileged male, communicates superior social and economic status, but Amy Jolly is not male. Rather, the donning of male garb gives her the ability to move and function powerfully among men. The tuxedo here works on a variety of levels to communicate that Amy Jolly is completely in control of herself and her surroundings. As Zucker points out:

Dietrich never utters a word throughout the shot. She affects “masculine” mannerisms: dangles her cigarette between her lips on the side of her mouth when she smokes; she places her top hat jauntily to the side of her head like a swell, pushing it up as a man would, rather than arranging the brim to suit her hairstyle; she takes a handkerchief out of her pants pocket; plucks her bowtie to straighten it and pulls the tie away from her neck as though it were constricting an adam’s apple. When she holds out her arm with her jacket on it, it is not to remind her employer of his duty as a gentleman, but to assert the natural prerogative of the master. Lo Tinto assumes an inferior role. Even though he is the proprietor, he behaves as though he is Dietrich’s valet. (Zucker 98)

When Dietrich’s Amy Jolly dons this tuxedo, she makes an assertive, yet aloof statement about the diversity of female sexuality. The message communicates that women are far more complicated than gowns, jewels and makeup. Her self-confidence is clear as she prepares to take control of the audience, as if to prepare for battle and to win that battle. She controls the scene with her drive and her traditionally masculine gestures. She communicates power by having Lo Tinto serve her (which also foreshadows Le Bessiere serving her later in the film when he too is wearing a tuxedo). The tuxedo indicates role

reversal as a means of female empowerment, not merely androgynous appeal. Amy can face the audience and get what she wants as she does with *Lo Tinto*.

Previous analyses of this scene present Amy Jolly as both a trailblazing image for lesbians in the cinema (Weiss 85), while Andrew Sarris sees Amy's outfit as one that symbolizes a range of images that embody and vary from irrationality to perversity to pansexuality (28). Sternberg himself admitted that he wanted to be provocative by having Dietrich wear the tuxedo. "I wanted to touch lightly on the lesbian element" (Baxter 79). This "element" is also a reference to Dietrich's early days in Berlin cabaret performances. But Dietrich biographer Stephen Bach articulates that the scene is something very specifically symbolic of Amy Jolly as no ordinary female character in the world of film. "Her exhibition [is] of astonishing self-possession and authority; she takes the stage in the most memorable enunciation of sexual ambiguity in any picture. It is a signal that the woman who 'won't need any help' is prepared to take on a man's world in a man's uniform with a man's daring" (Bach 133). Amy Jolly's self-possession signals that she is not dominated in the least, that she is independent, and her performance communicates the ability to be productive even in the most prohibitive of circumstances.

As DelGaudio discusses, Simone de Beauvoir has a positive perception of how cross-dressing empowers women. She claims that since men are always seen as human and women are fe-male there is an opportunity to 'refashion' female identity in a way that does not involve the usual feminine decorations.

Cross-dressing can also be viewed as a political statement that utilizes costume to redefine the female self. Simone de Beauvoir suggests that the definition of woman as female and man as human being forces woman into a position of

male-imitation at those times when she most wants to be viewed as a human being. De Beauvoir's suggests that women could actually seek a kind of self-definition by imitating men. (DelGaudio 107)

Amy Jolly establishes self-definition through the use of the tuxedo. The vision may seem like an aspect of mere entertainment, but the image empowers Amy Jolly in Allen's meaning of the term since she is resisting male domination by clothing herself in a manner that communicates equality. This visual equality also allows Amy to define her own image instead of being told what kind of costume she should wear in the cabaret. The sequence can be read as radical since there is a woman taking charge of her financial security instead of merely finding a man to pay for her.

The cabaret performance in which Amy Jolly first sings her French song "Quand l'amour meurt/When everything is finished" allows Amy to earn her right to create a controversial image and performance style within the safe confines of the nightclub. It seems like mere entertainment on the surface, but in reality Amy Jolly's success gives her power. Even Gaylyn Studlar agrees that the notion of performance allowed for the censors to let this controversial scene pass. "We can only speculate that perhaps these sophisticated, wordless hints at the transgression of gender and sexual norms were tolerated because they were contextualized as being part of the heroine's performance" (220). The censors let the song and resulting kiss of a woman pass since it was 'an act.' In French she sings the sad love song.

When everything is finished
 When your dream dies
 Why cry escaped days,
 Regret the song's parties?

The kisses are shriveled
 The novel ends soon
 Yet the heart is not healed
 When everything is finished
 We pledge, in his madness,
 From s'adorer long, long
 It is charming, she is beautiful

By a spring evening gay
 But one day, for nothing, without cause,
 Love fades with flowers
 So we left there, everything else
 The heart tight, eyes filled with tears

(Refrain)

While an American audience will probably not understand the lyrics, other meanings are communicated visually, non-verbally, through the fact of her song and her manner. Amy Jolly's use of French defines her as worldly and intelligent. She confidently performs in another language and the song is one of pessimistic wisdom acquired as a result of many a broken heart. "Love fades with flowers" and "Why cry escaped days?" And if one does understand French, the lyrics communicate another kind of battle that has been fought: one of love lost and never recovered. The song suggests a bisexual connotation when in its reference to "She is beautiful", as it leaves open the possibility that Amy Jolly could have loved a woman and lost her and has come to Morocco to forget. Or perhaps she has lost her man to another woman. The ambiguity provides a rich terrain for interpretation. Amy can freely communicate her feelings without shame because the song is in French, which creates intimacy. As in *The Blue Angel*, her song functions as confession; though it is just a song, and Amy does not have to claim any part of it as personal or truthful. As

a final observation, Le Bessiere does speak French, which makes Amy all the more intriguing to him.

Amy Jolly's lack of shame about her sexuality, whatever its orientation, is another aspect of her ability to circumvent domination and function as a resistant character according to Allen's model. She uses the song as a way to express herself and establish truth about herself if anyone can understand it. Allen elaborates on this notion: "Power operates in and through the practice of confession to subject individuals to the injunction to tell the truth about their sexuality and to enable them to take up the position of sexual subject" (Allen 36). Amy Jolly uses the cabaret scene as a way to express her true self, earn money, and find companionship. After the song is over she reinforces the possibility that she is bisexual through a flirtation with a woman and a man, as Andrea Weiss points out:

When her song is finished and she steps over the railing separating performer and audience, the image becomes a tableau. When Amy Jolly looks at the woman at the table, she quickly lowers her eyes to take in the entire body, to 'look her over'; she then turns away and hesitates before looking at the woman again. The sexual impulses are strong in this gesture, impulses that are not diffused or choked by point of view or audience cutaway shots. Dietrich's gaze remains intact. (Weiss, 35)

Here, the most shocking aspect of the scene is when Amy Jolly "asks for a woman's flower," and kisses her on the mouth. It is a moment that is seen as humorous by the crowd in the film, because they don't fully understand its implication. She performs the very behavior of a powerful man and she earns the approval of the audience in the process because to the audience it is merely an act, a fiction for entertainment. The

reality is that through her performance she empowers herself by being honest about her sexuality, though the sexuality can be read a variety of ways.

What is particularly important to notice about this cabaret scene is that it reveals how Marlene Dietrich's characters subvert assumptions about what it means to be feminine or masculine, powerless or powerful. The assumption is that a female cabaret performer is salacious and inviting a male gaze; this is usually achieved through clothing that is more feminine, i.e. gowns or dresses with plunging necklines or revealing dancewear. In addition, the female performer is often thought to be the powerless object of a heterosexual male gaze. But Amy Jolly is not typical. She reinvents the notion of what it means to be a performing woman with power. As Gaylyn Studlar points out:

Morocco and *Blonde Venus* offer a self-referential examination of the relationship of the spectatorial gaze to the image of the performer. Possession through gaze is actually nonpossession, just as Amy cannot hold onto Tom or Le Bessiere cannot keep Amy. Amy wanders through the nightclub audience; a man attempts to hold her by her clothing. She stops, stares at him, then pulls away. (Studlar 66)

Through Amy's assumption of masculine clothing and aloof, controlled, and confident movement during the cabaret performance, she proves that she cannot be possessed.

Also, through her "confession" of her sexuality and life experience through song, Amy Jolly becomes compelling and unique when read through the lens of Amy Allen's conception of power relations; she is an eloquent example that Mulvey's theory of woman as fetishized object can be resisted. While she is the object central to the performance, she resists that form of domination and becomes empowered and independent by the end of the cabaret performance.

Amy Jolly's next cabaret outfit demonstrates Allen's model of resistance through its visual style of conveying her sexual confidence. She uses her confidence to resist the socio-economic forces that have the potential to cause objectification. In the next cabaret performance, she wears a black tunic suit, one that resembles an old fashioned swimming costume and a black and white feather boa with crystal bracelets. In her dressing room scene with Lo Tinto, he says to her, "Sell the apples! I get 90% and you take 10%. You'll make a fortune." In this portion of the film, Amy Jolly seems to be dominated by Lo Tinto, who garnishes her wages, which are contingent on her attractiveness and appeal towards the audience. However, the costume that reveals her legs helps her to become empowered and resist domination by using her resources of femininity, as Catherine Constable describes:

Robin Wood suggests that Dietrich's star persona can be formulated in terms of a question: 'How does a woman assert herself in a world where all the rules are made by men?' I would assert that she does so by using her resources of femininity, thus gaining success on her own terms. (Constable 4)

Constable confronts the previously held assumptions that when women are wearing furs, feathers, make up, and sexy costumes their only purpose is to be a pleasing image for a man. Instead, she looks at the instances when Marlene Dietrich's characters dress in more feminine clothing and claims that these are times when men can be most overpowered and Dietrich's women achieve this kind of success. Constable reinvents the terms of seductress, woman as caprice, and the torturess, discussing them as figures that embody female power in Dietrich's other film characters in *Devil Is A Woman*, *Shanghai Express* and *Scarlett Empress*.

Also, because Amy's tunic costume is flattering and accentuates her best features, she dominates her audience with her physical appearance and consequently empowers herself, as she becomes the satirical temptress with her apples. Dietrich's legs are shown within the context of the allusion to Eve tempting Adam with the apple when Amy sings her second song, "What do I sell for my apples?". DelGaudio points out that this is another tactic where Amy Jolly functions as an empowered character that is resisting objectifying forces.

This costume is the inverse of the previous scene's male attire, and here her purpose is to seduce the men in the audience by masquerading as Eve the temptress [selling the apples.] The costume serves to further confuse the identification of Amy's sexuality. (DelGaudio 110)

Here, Amy simultaneously mocks and confirms the notion of a woman as a temptress. She has a disconnected and aloof attitude towards selling the apples and pokes fun at the notion even further when she sings. Her stride is focused and businesslike. Gaylyn Studlar has written extensively in regards to this kind of sexually inflected subtext within Code-bound Hollywood. Specifically, she discusses the ironies of Dietrich becoming such a sensuous star during a time of moral conservatism during the 1930s. "The SRC (Studio Regulations Committee) strenuously negotiated to cut a much longer version of the scene where Amy passes out her song to sell and a key to her room is attached to the song. Whoever got the song with Amy's key could meet her. This scene was found to be too overt" (221). Instead, Amy approaches people all over the cabaret with apples and everyone wants to buy them. Here, Amy Jolly's sexual freedom is merely accepted as

part of the “performance;” nothing to be considered threatening to the moral well being of the audience.

Her Apartment

Amy Jolly is empowered by this point in the story since she now has financial stability that grants her independence and she asserts her will with the two men who are interested in her. She achieves this level of empowerment through her gestures, physical assertiveness and her feminine attributes. Specifically Allen defines this level of constraint as

Intentionally or unintentionally maintaining a course of action that limits the set of options from which he or she will be able to choose. This definition covers both overt behavior and anticipated reactions: An actor’s options can be constrained both by the overt behavior of another and by his or her anticipation of the other’s negative reaction to some subset of his or her options. This definition allows us to theorize both the power that such actors wielded by virtue of cultural, social, institutional and structural relationships. (Allen 124)

According to Allen’s model, Amy Jolly sets the limits of Tom Brown’s options. She is intriguing to him and he follows her lead. The overtly sexual tension between the two carries from the nightclub scene to the scene with him in her apartment. There, she stands behind him and gazes at him. He becomes the fetishized object while sitting in a passive position wearing a flower in his hair, anticipating Amy Jolly’s decision about his possible options with her. Though culturally he may have more power because he is a man, the structure of this relationship is based on the woman as the aggressor and the man as passive follower. Tom Brown even confesses himself by sharing with Amy Jolly, “I’m going to tell you something I have never told any other woman. I wish I had met

you ten years ago.” His moment of vulnerability is a reaction to her sharing with him that she never found a man “good enough” to marry. His is a confession that implies a life of struggle and heartache, while her confession seems to suggest that she has been in control and is alone because no one has met her standards.

Amy Jolly’s conservative black wrap chiffon outfit communicates independence and a desire to resist the conventional lifestyle of women who are dominated by men. The outfit completely covers her body and prevents her from being viewed as an object for the male gaze. Instead, when Tom Brown visits her, her handshake and candid defense of the struggles of women reveal that she is in no way interested in being in a relationship where her voice is taken for granted. She becomes an advocate for women’s issues that have been overlooked.

The sexual ambiguity and role reversals here are a sign of Sternberg’s understanding of woman’s position as both soldier and victim within male-dominated society. Amy describes herself as a member of the Foreign Legion of Women and one who has come to Morocco to do as Legionnaire Brown has tried to do, ‘ditch the past.’ Sternberg’s vision of discomfort [that women experience] remains more radical than sexist. (DelGaudio, 109)

Here, Amy Jolly represents women’s issues for the female spectator. She is the empowered female representing those who look to be more than just a pretty face for a man. She describes and defends the hardships of women when speaking to Brown. She says, “Women wear no uniforms—no flags—no medals when they are brave” (109). Suggesting that women suffer in silence and that Amy Jolly is determined to break that silence. According to DelGaudio’s perspective, she represents the women whose

“struggle is one of constant self-definition” (109). Throughout the rest of the film, Amy Jolly’s costumes reveal the transitions within her desire to resist domination, achieve empowerment and ultimately possess the power to act as she pleases.

Her Dressing Room

At this point in the story, Tom Brown has professed his affection for Amy Jolly and Le Bessiere has done the same. What transpires for the rest of the film within this love triangle is that each person is in a situation of constraint that is caused by another person. Le Bessiere wishes to be with Amy but she wishes to be with Tom Brown. Meanwhile, Brown is an insecure suitor for Amy and has nothing to offer her. Brown’s insecurity forces him to flee Morocco for war and Amy is abandoned. These subject positions produce outcomes that create situations of domination and resistance to that domination for all three characters. Their specific moments of limitation and constraint force each character to seek empowerment and resist dominating circumstances.

Amy’s agreement to be a companion to Le Bessiere is a form of empowerment/resistance because she uses the very heterosexual norms that constrain her in order to gain power and socio-economic mobility. By using herself as a commodity and attracting Le Bessiere, she allows him to give the assistance that he offered in the beginning of the film. In return, she acquires privileges that Le Bessiere can give her. For example, Le Bessiere presents her with a gift of jewelry, festoons her dressing room with flowers and pours the champagne. All of these are the symbols of a man in pursuit of a woman, but it is he who is controlled: Amy has power-to-manipulate his will. He serves Amy and follows her lead. Within this scene, Amy Jolly has power over Le

Bessiere in that she can “constrain [what] the choices of another actor [are] and can accomplish this task so that it works to the other’s advantage”(Allen 125). Throughout the rest of the film, Amy Jolly limits the choices of Le Bessiere, while Tom Brown constrains the choices of Amy Jolly.

Amy also exerts control over the exchange of jewelry in the dressing room sequence, which rewards her the opportunity of power to inhibit Le Bessiere’s potential of masculine domination towards her. Sternberg’s use of props, in this case jewelry, enacts an exchange of “goods” within the scene, but Amy keeps the odds in her favor by limiting Le Bessiere’s options. Le Bessiere attempts to buy her affection by giving her a diamond and emerald bracelet. She says, “I can’t accept this, it’s worth a fortune.” La Bessiere responds, “Anything of less value would be unworthy of you.” She hears a buzzer indicating that she needs to get ready for the next performance. She refuses Le Bessiere’s proposal of marriage as Brown listens from the other side of the dressing room door. Zucker has analyzed the ways in which this sequence reveals Amy Jolly’s empowerment, and her resistance to Le Bessiere’s attempts to have power over her.

It is not by chance that he offers the bracelet in advance of his proposal. He wishes to purchase the goods he wants with the commodity he has. If they cannot converge on an emotional plane, they must do so on the level of commerce. The clasping of the bracelet around her wrist implies enslavement that Amy rejects by removing the bracelet and placing it among the other items on her dressing room table. Amy changes the instrument of bondage into her own weapon. She understands the nature of their ‘exchange’ and is able to dictate its limits. (Zucker 58)

In this scene Amy manipulates the prop her own way and does not allow Le Bessiere to think she wants or needs it. She takes it off so as not to convey that she is easily pleased or bought. She knows that the gift is to buy her time or to communicate that she is a commodity, but her rejection of it keeps Le Bessiere in a constant state of attempting to find ways to please her. Then the bracelet becomes Amy's own weapon in that she can control to what extent Le Bessiere can function in her world. She rejects the marriage proposal, thereby prohibiting Le Bessiere so that he continues to follow her lead and she produces the control that she needs to keep.

During Amy Jolly's third cabaret performance, Brown abandons Amy because he feels intimidated as a result of her access to wealth and privilege that the connection to Le Bessiere offers. The musical accompaniment underscores the performance of Brown's feeling of male insecurity and domination as a result of what Brown assumes is by a woman who seems to desire fancy jewels and an elegant lifestyle. Brown thinks Amy desires money and power from a man and he cannot offer the same things as Le Bessiere. This moment punctuates the concept of resistance for Amy Jolly's situation in that she carries higher socio-economic status as a result of being connected to Le Bessiere. However, this moment also ends up putting Amy in a dominating position because Brown leaves her. Zucker explains this moment:

Hot jazz from the nightclub in which Dietrich [Amy Jolly] works accompanies Cooper's slow movement. The music functions both as a rhythmic counterpoint to the contemplative pace of walk and as an expressive indicator of Cooper's mental conflict. (*Cinema Journal*, Zucker 24)

In this moment, cabaret music underscores the choice that Tom Brown makes to leave Amy Jolly and Morocco on his possible suicidal mission. He chooses to constrain her choices by leaving her. Brown now has the power over Amy Jolly because she wants to be with him and he rejects her. The result of this cabaret scene shifts the power within the lives of Jolly, Le Bessiere and Brown. Out of desperation, instead of love, Amy agrees to marry Le Bessiere.

The Engagement Party

Amy Jolly's desire for independence, her gestures of defiance with her jewelry, indicates the ability to achieve empowerment. Her acceptance of Le Bessiere's marriage proposal seems like a way for her to obtain power because she will marry a man with money. Actually, however, she is in a situation of domination and constraint because Sternberg fashions her clothing to indicate that Le Bessiere's wealth is suffocating her. She wears the diamond and emerald bracelet and a strand of long pearls. The strand is placed around her neck as if it is a leash. The bracelet is clasped around her wrist like a handcuff. Her facial expression communicates an inner conflict at the prospect of marrying a man she does not love. Demonstrating her conflict through her gestures, after she hears the Legionnaires return, she breaks the pearls in front of the guests at the engagement dinner in an act of defiance to the potential domination that marriage to a powerful man would bring. Amy Jolly symbolically frees herself from the dominating circumstances of a marriage to Le Bessiere. DelGaudio looks at "the breaking of the necklace as a loss of control" (112), but this is a limited perception. The necklace is not being worn in a manner that is flattering for the pearls because it is knotted towards Le

Bessiere's direction. Using Allen's model of empowerment, we can understand that this positioning indicates the beginning of Le Bessiere's dominating potential in Amy's life. The necklace is fashioned to make Amy Jolly seem like possession and someone who will be tamed or controlled. And so, in an act of resistance, she frees herself from the potential domination of marriage in order to achieve empowerment and independence for herself.

When Amy Jolly wears costumes that are similar to Le Bessiere it is to indicate that she is able to resist domination by a privileged male by visually placing herself at his level. All of the costumes she wears when she interacts with Le Bessiere allow her to empower herself and be in control of her choices. Her empowerment is realized when he follows her and helps her get the man she really wants, Tom Brown. This level of equality from Le Bessiere to Amy Jolly communicates that a female character possesses power to make choices in regards to her own lifestyle. Allen's model of empowerment allows us to understand that Le Bessiere is working in solidarity with Amy Jolly for the common goal to find Brown. Also, she chooses to reject a lifestyle that society encourages women to embrace when she breaks off the engagement to a wealthy man; since once she marries Le Bessiere she becomes his property. If she chooses a Legionnaire then she chooses someone who cannot buy her or treat her like a possession. Economic and social mores do not determine decisions for her. Amy Jolly can earn her own living and thereby live wherever she wants.

The ending of *Morocco* is one that embodies all three perspectives of Allen's theory of domination, resistance and solidarity. Amy joins the coalition of women who

make up the rear guard. She joins the war effort in order to be with the man she loves. Her limitations with regard to money, food and a place to live might make her circumstances seem impoverished and dominated; but it's her choice. The costume she wears is all white and she blends in with the sun and the women who "love their men." Perhaps this ending symbolizes Amy Jolly's desire to take a chance. Or perhaps she has finally found someone good enough. Andrew Sarris notes, "*Morocco* is a story about a woman who becomes humbled by a man" (29). However, Amy is not humbled as much as she is in a stage of resistance since she chooses to be with Brown and she is not married to him. She can earn her own money and leave him at her discretion. The final stage of Allen's theory is solidarity or coalition building. Amy Jolly has joined the group of women who are the unsung heroines who are unafraid to follow their men into battle. Amy Jolly cares not for the materialism of the life that Le Bessiere could give her; hers is journey of her own choosing.

Morocco ultimately communicates diverse perceptions of empowerment and gender for a newer audience of the film. Amy Allen refers to the concept that "gender [...] is continually enacted and performed. It is possible for individuals to alter their performances in ways that might subvert the heterosexist norms that govern its very production. Everything turns on how we perform our gender" (Allen 67). Amy Jolly performs her gender in a variety of ways in *Morocco* depending on the circumstances. She is rebellious, modern, masculine and bisexual in her first cabaret scene. She is free and unashamed of her sexuality when she sings. She uses her resources of femininity to empower herself and attract more interest without the least bit of fear or insecurity during

her second song. Then, ultimately, in the end she resists the forms of domination that could suffocate her when she is honest with herself about the life she really wants.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Marlene Dietrich's image is one that can be examined from diverse perspectives. This thesis recognizes the levels of empowerment that exist in the first two films in which she starred, *Morocco* and *The Blue Angel*. Theorist Amy Allen's model of empowerment creates an illuminating filter through which to view these films because Dietrich's characters, Amy Jolly and Lola Frölich, both conform to fit into a mainstream expectation of what is acceptable for a woman's behavior and appearance and yet convey, through the non-verbal communicative elements of gestures, body language and costumes, a more complex perspective. These elements suggest that Dietrich's women are strong-willed, cool, not in the least bit fraught with excessive sentimentality, and live their lives unapologetically.

Allen's methodology has allowed me to navigate through feminist film theory with an optimistic approach. Her succinct definitions of *domination*, *resistance*, *gender*, *performativity* and *solidarity* help to motivate and inspire a new generation of feminist theorists who can learn from the past and create a goal for future research that aids in refreshing alternative and current interpretations. For instance, Allen's theory applies to real life social issues of power, but I use it to analyze two very notable films from the early 1930s. Future research which might be developed from this thesis would analyze Dietrich's remaining Sternberg films—*Dishonored*, *Scarlett Empress*, *Shanghai Express*, *Blonde Venus* and *The Devil is a Woman*—to see how the female characters in these films achieve levels of empowerment consistent with Amy Allen's model of power relations. Prominent feminist film theorists such as Catherine Constable and Elisabeth

Bronfen have already begun to confront, question and reinterpret Gaylyn Studlar's book *In the Realm of Pleasure, von Sternberg, Dietrich and the Masochistic Aesthetic*. This work analyzes the Paramount films starring Marlene Dietrich, but does not include *The Blue Angel*. The logical continuation of my work would be to analyze the rest of the Sternberg-Dietrich collaboration in order to conclude whether the aspects of costume, body language/gesture and presence of cabaret performance enhance or detract from Dietrich's characters' resistance to dominating forces from a feminist perspective. Achieving this goal would mean that mine would be the only research in which the entire Dietrich/Sternberg cycle has been reframed from a feminist methodology developed within the last ten years.

Alternatively, *Blonde Venus* might be examined singly within Allen's framework; this particular story goes beyond the confines of cabaret performance and touches on serious social issues regarding women's role in the family. Dietrich's character, Helen Faraday, at the beginning of the film is just another stage performer trying to earn money until she becomes entangled in a forbidden relationship that forces her to lose her child and all possible career choices. This film becomes a commentary about the plights of women who in no way during the 1930s could easily be single mothers. The story becomes one that criticizes male domination of women as seen in the final scenes of the film when Helen reconciles with her husband.

Blonde Venus subtly parallels Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* because Helen Faraday sacrifices her pride in order to save her husband's life just as Nora Helmer does in Ibsen's play. A textual analysis involving both stories could be developed in order to

analyze the unexpected yet significant creative voices of Ibsen and Sternberg and position their contributions to early feminist perspectives. This kind of research might explore how each man's storytelling helped to confront and communicate the female voice (albeit as represented by men) and social issues for women. To what extent are both men confronting similar thematic issues and do their other stories connect beyond *A Doll's House* and *Blonde Venus*. Are there other films by Sternberg, which parallel other Ibsen plays where each attempts to communicate the issues of domination, resistance and solidarity? A research project such as this would emphasize the developing voices of both men and how each gave credence to women's issues. Possibly an emergent female audience found the works of Sternberg and Ibsen to inspire a confrontation of the struggles of women in order to seek out new ways to articulate their own levels of empowerment and freedom.

Additional future research might continue to use Allen's theory as a way to analyze the extent of female protagonists' conformity and resistance to social constructions of gender and sexuality in a variety of cinematic and literary narratives. This type of analysis of resistance could provide a method for demonstrating how any character, not simply one who is central to the story, may nevertheless possess dynamic characteristics. For instance, Allen's model can be used in articulating how female characters experience oppression, find freedom from that oppression and ultimately achieve a level of empowerment and solidarity with others. This kind of focused analysis can be used as a means to introduce feminist analysis to those who are new to its concepts.

Other future research related to my implementation of Allen's model with Dietrich's first two films might determine a way in which to apply a resistant feminist performance model to media studies more generally. Allen's model might be usefully developed and applied to the performance techniques of female pop stars, musical theatre artists, reality shows, and/or actresses for stage, film and television. One might select perhaps two prominent performers or figures from the mainstream media and incorporate my methodology based on Allen's feminist philosophy in order to determine how the costumes, gestures, body language, plot development/life circumstances and overall image of these stars communicate female empowerment through performance. For instance, one could select two well known and bankable actresses such as Meryl Streep and Julia Roberts and attempt to discover to what extent each woman's most honored performances communicate female empowerment through the levels of domination, resistance and solidarity. Alternatively, one might examine a self-made woman such as Oprah Winfrey and set out to discover to what extent her talk show causes viewers to feel empowered by it. Viewers become involved in the shows various applications such as the "Living Your Best Life" series, Oprah's Book Club, visits by Dr. Oz and Dr. Laura Berman along with her continued public battle regarding her weight and body image issues.

Future research inspired by this thesis might also connect productively to the field of Performance Studies. Pop star Madonna's work spans over twenty five years of live and recorded performance and she has channeled Dietrich's image in a variety of costumes for her various successful tours. Similar to Dietrich, Madonna's image has

always been one of empowerment and unrepressed sexual independence. Future research might systematically examine the relationship between Dietrich and Madonna's careers and personae specifically in terms of Amy Allen's theorizations of power and an exploration of body language, gesture, and costume.

On a final note, through the journey of my thesis project I discovered that the 2007 *Dietrich Icon* text was developed from a Marlene Dietrich Festival at Dartmouth College in 2001. There were drag queens performing her songs, new journal articles written analyzing the cultural impact on her image in the 21st century and theorists such as Judith Mayne and Gaylyn Studlar revisiting their early perceptions of Dietrich's work. Coincidentally, Amy Allen teaches at Dartmouth College. At no point in the *Icon* text is Allen mentioned, but perhaps Dartmouth College would have an interest in the perspectives that I have focused on in this thesis. Perhaps Dartmouth should consider an installation (similar to the one in Berlin) centered on Marlene Dietrich and the various studies that converge as a result of her impact on the world of entertainment and world history. No woman did more for the war effort during World War II and certainly Dietrich is among that precious group of paradoxical women in cinematic history that found ways to reinvent themselves while still perpetuating an enigmatic image. She was a citizen of Germany, America and the world. The lovely, legendary *empowered* Marlene.

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